Rugby Union International England 20 Argentina 18

England's shambles

Robert Armstrong at Twickenham

ENGLAND avoided the humiliation of a home defeat by the amateurs of Argentina in this friendly international, but there was no escaping the grotesque shambles of their worst performance since Jack Rowell took charge in 1994. Over-hyped, overpaid and over-trained to the point of staleness, England relied on that familiar standby, the driving maul, to get them out of jail with a match-saving try by the temporary captain, Jason Leonard.

Rowell's disorganised crew — team would be a misnomer for them — entered into the Christmas spirit by handing six penalties which the excellent Argentine goalkicker, Gonzalo Quesada, took with aplomb despite unsporting whistling from the crowd of 60,000. Argentina's 18-12 lead late in the game fairly reflected their superior organisation and all-round ability.

Since the World Cup 18 months ago England have learned nothing and forgotten many of the basic lessons about forward play that underpinned their success under the previous manager Geoff Cooke.

Rowell talks about getting to grips with the "issues" of team selection and development, yet he seems increasingly out of touch as a modern Test coach, with little to show from the past year. England's root problem was their inability to build a solid platform under persistent pressure from a highly motivated Argentine pack. Martin and Bouza were ultra-competitive in the back row and the locks Sporleder and Llanes are big, broad-chested athletes with a surprising turn of pace. As Leonard pointed out: "Their front row [Grau, Promanzio and Reggiardo] outweighed us, though we are not small."

Behind the scrum Argentina showed greater composure and tactical nous as their half-backs Miranda and Quesada demonstrated with shrewd option-taking.

Fortunately the Argentine forwards were almost as undisciplined as the English, committing close-quarter offences that allowed Catt to kick five superb penalty goals and keep his side in touch until Leonard and friends rumbled over in the left corner eight minutes from time.

England may be professional in body as well as mind, yet the disjointed pattern of the domestic season will embroil squad members successively in the Pilkington Cup, the Courage League and the European Cup over the next six weeks. That *mélange* of demanding fixtures cannot be the ideal preparation for the Five Nations competition.

England's palpable lack of aggression and creative ideas last Saturday allowed a so-called second-rank rugby nation to come perilously close to inflicting embarrassing damage.



Hit and run . . . Nick Beal finds Tony Underwood in close support after being felled by an Argentine tackle at Twickenham PHOTOGRAPH: DAN SMITH

Scotland 29 Italy 22

Scots have the edge

Gordon Lyle at Murrayfield

SCOTLAND will be able to look forward to the Five Nations with greater optimism based on an improved second-half display in the final game before they open their campaign here against Wales next month.

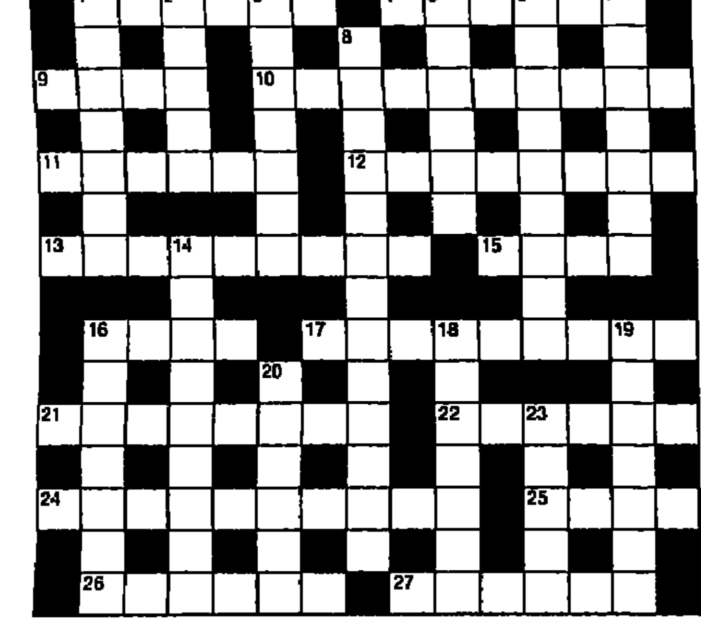
After trailing the Italians 12-8 at the interval, the Scots cut loose when it mattered, with the decisive try coming from the replacement, Derek Stark, 12 minutes from the end.

While the margin of victory in the first full-cap meeting between the countries may not appear flattering, the Scots looked sharper in several areas. In an improved scrummage the new cap, Mattie Stewart, shone at tight head while Scotland were more competitive at the restarts largely due to the recalled Andy Reed. There was also some excellent finishing from the backs.

Scotland's coach, Richie Dixon, acknowledged that his side had made a lot of mistakes in the first half, but added: "We pulled things together to score some very fine tries. The line-out continues to be a worry but I was delighted with the way our backs took their chances."

The Italians relied heavily on their stand-off Diego Dominguez, who kicked 15 points to take his international tally past the 400-mark on his 33rd appearance.

Cryptic crossword by Rufus



Across

1 Regular girl student (6)
4 Educational measure? (6)
9 Turns up with a mother cat (4)
10 It helps the dough spread farther (7,3)
11 Irregular forces decoration (6)
12 Jack Sprat's catch? (8)
13 The height of architectural draughtsmanship (9)
15 Reader's request for original work (4)
16 It is fitting amidst extremes of penury (4)
17 Stringent restriction takes vice to a low level (9)
21 Unearth a tomb in a Canadian province (8)
22 Discover a doctor breaking the law (6)
24 One who provides a luncheon voucher (4,6)
25 Female soldiers after company (4)
26 Not off upon a visit, but ready to make one (2,4)
27 What the champagne did when little Florence got married? (6)

Down

1 Not involved in fight, so not charged (7)
2 Gathers in spare parts (5)
3 Publicise wine where it's duty free (7)
5 Show EEC arrangements about French wine (6)
6 Expressed sorrow about abstainer caught in cupidity (9)
7 It's obvious I've turned up to make an impression (7)
8 International shipping lines (8,5)
14 Acidly critical? (9)
16 Fix old boy up with dummy pill (7)
18 Master takes female over fifty, in marriage (7)
19 He's angry about the ref being wrong (7)
20 John, half-gone on the bottle, is jolly (6)
23 Tropical bird with head of mynah and a cry of a rook (5)

Last week's solution

		S	P	H	Y	G	M	O	G	R	A	M		
Q		O		Y		E		N		A		O		A
L	A	M	B	E	T	H		T	R	I	C	O	R	N
O		E		N		E		A		N		N		D
B	A	R	G	A	I	N	E	R		L	L	A	M	A
A		S				N		I		E		N		L
L	I	E	F		R	A	Z	O	R	S	E	D	G	E
		T		P						S		S		
L	A	M	B	R	E	Q	U	I	N		L	I	Z	A
E		A		O		U		M				X		S
T	R	U	M	P		E	P	I	S	C	O	P	A	L
T		G		O		S		T		A		E		E
E	X	H	A	U	S	T		A	S	K	A	N	C	E
R		A		N		E		N		E		C		P
		M	O	D	E	R	N	T	A	S	T	E		

Wales 20 South Africa 37

Boks win gem of a game

SOUTH AFRICA might currently be rated only the second-best side behind New Zealand but they turned in a performance worthy of world champions in outscoring never-say-die Wales by five tries to one in an enthralling match in Cardiff, *writes Robert Armstrong*.

Joost van der Westhuizen underlined his status as the best scrum-half in Test rugby with a hat-trick of tries that ensured there would be no Welsh comeback in the final half-hour.

Indeed, it was like examining a necklace of glittering gems that offered fresh facets wherever one chose to cast the eye: individual cameos of extraordinary skill from Honiball, Small, Joubert, Howley and Bateman flashed by in rapid succession.

None of Van der Westhuizen's mesmerising scores, however, would have been possible without the fearsome pace and power of the Springbok forwards, whose work in broken play created innumerable opportunities. Kruger, Dalton, Andrews and the captain Teichmann behaved like men at the start of a tour rather than battle-weary professionals who have now forged six successive Test victories in four months, including a series win in France.

The Springboks built a comfortable 16-6 lead within 25 minutes. Jenkins reduced it to 16-9 with his third penalty goal but Van der Westhuizen proved to be in irrepressible mood, scoring a fine solo try on the left after a bamboozling, mazy run.

On the stroke of half-time Jenkins again reduced the South African lead with a short-range penalty but the second period had barely begun when Van der Westhuizen again showed his predatory instincts, tearing the ball out of a maul in front of the Welsh posts and crashing over to complete his hat-trick. Jenkins's fifth penalty goal barely interrupted the Springboks' progress, which saw the left wing Olivier bustle over for a fifth try in the right corner.

In the final quarter Wales's aim was to keep the scoreline respectable, which meant defending in depth with courage and organisation as the Springboks launched wave after wave of attacks, driving through the middle or spinning the ball wide with flicked passes.

Twelve minutes from time the flanker Nathan Thomas became the first player to win a Welsh cap while registered with Bath when he came on as substitute for McIntosh, who had a knee injury.

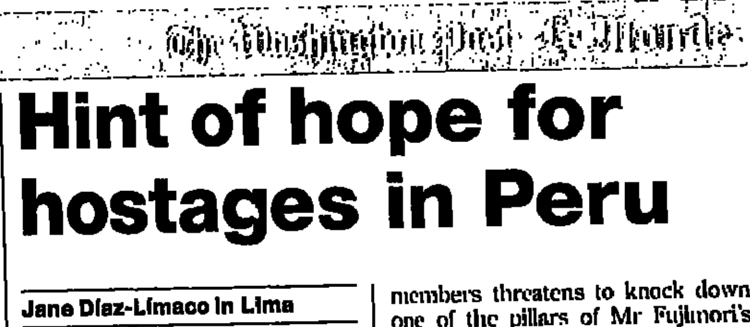
With three minutes left, Arwel Thomas scored a magnificent consolation try at the left flag, taking off in an elegant swallow dive after Howley fired the ball out from the base of a scrum. It was the least Wales deserved for their brave and unrelenting effort.

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Hint of hope for hostages in Peru

Jane Diaz-Limaco in Lima

TALKS between Peru's government and leftwing Tupac Amaru rebels, who seized the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima on December 17, produced the first tentative signs of progress last weekend with the release of 20 more hostages and an apparent easing of rebel demands.

But some of the remaining 83 hostages warned that their situation was becoming more precarious as rebels whittled down the group of captives to those they identified most closely with the Peruvian administration.

Amid concern about an apparent deadlock in negotiations, the arrival at the besieged Japanese ambassador's residence of the government's designated negotiator, the education minister Domingo Palermo, brought some hope.

In the first confirmation that the government was talking to the rebels, Mr Palermo entered the rebel-held building. His negotiations with the rebel leader, Néstor Cerpa, lasted three-and-a-half hours.

Shortly afterwards, the rebels released 20 hostages in what they termed a "goodwill gesture", maintaining an effort to convince Peruvians that they differ from the country's other rebel group, Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), in considering violence only as a final resort. About 80 hostages, out of an original number of of more than 400, were thought to be still inside the embassy on Monday.

The rebels now seem to be seeking a way out within the ground rules imposed by Peru's president, Alberto Fujimori, who has refused to free any jailed guerrillas but has offered guarantees if they lay down their arms.

Diplomats say Lima might offer to create a commission to review prison conditions as part of a deal, while the captors are likely to demand safe passage, either to their Peruvian jungle stronghold or a friendly country such as Cuba.

The hostage crisis is a personal blow for the country's maverick president. By choosing the residence of this particular country's chief envoy, Tupac Amaru has taken into account Mr Fujimori's Japanese roots and close links with the country, which he has visited several times since taking office in 1990.

The rebels may therefore have hoped that Mr Fujimori, who generally shuns Lima's cocktail party circuit, might have made an exception to attend the reception in honour of the Japanese emperor's birthday.

He did not, but his mother, Matsue, and his sister, Juana, were at the party; they were released on December 17. Mr Fujimori's brother, Pedro, was also there, and is still being held.

The rebels' initial demand for the release of imprisoned Tupac Amaru members threatens to knock down one of the pillars of Mr Fujimori's government programme. Since 1992, his government has been characterised by its hard line on suspected rebels. Citing rebel violence and court judicial impotence because of corruption and fear as the main reasons for his 1992 coup, Mr Fujimori suspended constitutional guarantees and introduced a new court system for suspected guerrillas. Most of the higher-ranking rebels were tried by military courts in almost summary trials. Masked judges presided over all subversion cases.

The prison regime for convicted rebels is harsh. Leaders are forbidden visits for a year; after that they are allowed one short visit a month. They are allowed out of their cells for half an hour a day.

The crisis also threatens Peru's carefully rebuilt international relations and tourism industry. Mr Fujimori has just secured acceptance of Peru as a member of the Asian Pacific Economic Co-operation Forum (Apec), and had succeeded in rescheduling its Paris Club debt and finalised terms with commercial bank debtors on money owed since 1984.

Also affected are Japanese state employees in Peru. Japanese aid to the country since 1990 totals $2.2 billion.

About 30,000 people have died in political violence in Peru since the infamous Maoist guerrilla army, Shining Path began its insurgency in 1980. Tupac Amaru emerged in 1984 as the armed wing of the leftwing People's Democratic Union. In contrast to the austere approach of Shining Path, it has revelled in publicity, with a penchant for showy or symbolic acts.

Comment, page 8

ASIA'S most formidable "tiger" economy, South Korea, has been traumatised since last week by a wave of massive strikes and demonstrations in protest at the undemocratic curtailment of workers' rights, *writes Mike Wilbur*.

The unrest highlights the country's profound economic and social tensions and raises fresh doubts about the sustainability of very high economic growth rates as Asian living standards catch up with those in the industrialised West.

About 373,000 workers have joined the strike at some 700 work sites across South Korea, union leaders said.

Riots erupted in Seoul (above) after the ruling party clandestinely pushed legislation through the National Assembly to undermine employees' rights. The government insists changes are vital to fend off the threat from low-cost economies such as China.

The strikes and demonstrations were provoked by a secret pre-dawn meeting of President Kim Young Sam's ruling New Korea Party, attended only by party members. They took six minutes to ram through laws that had been fought bitterly by the opposition.

The new law will allow companies to lay off workers, hire temporary staff and replace strikers.

North Korea apology, page 3

PHOTOGRAPH: CHUNG KYUNG-RYUL

Inquiry slates Serbian poll fraud

Julian Borger

SERBIA'S protest movement scored an important victory last week when international mediators unequivocally upheld opposition wins in local elections and called on President Slobodan Milosevic to respect the will of the people.

The judgment by the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), was greeted with jubilation in Belgrade by crowds of opposition supporters who have protested daily since the government refused to accept a string of defeats in major cities in municipal elections on November 17.

But the celebrations turned sour on Friday last week, when police clashed with protesters returning home from a rally. Witnesses said police attacked with truncheons after being jeered. At least one person was beaten unconscious.

The crackdown on the demonstrators claimed its first victim on December 24, when Predrag Starcevic, aged 39, was beaten to death during clashes between an estimated 30,000 government supporters — who had been bused in from the provinces and plied with alcohol — and an opposition crowd of 150,000.

Last weekend thousands of angry protesters paid their final respects to the first martyr to the cause of toppling Mr Milosevic. The three opposition leaders — Vuk Draskovic, Zoran Djindjic and Vesna Pesic — walked behind the hearse along with Starcevic's widow, 10 Orthodox priests bearing lighted candles, and about 50 mourners carrying wreaths.

After the funeral, 10,000 demonstrators chanting "Slobo murderer" defied a police ban to march on Revolution Boulevard and confront armed riot police.

On Sunday Serbian police blocked a further march by 50,000 people in Belgrade in the 42nd successive day of demonstrations. At the start of the demonstration, an actor read what he said was an open letter to Mr Milosevic, his army chief and university students in the city of Nis, from military representations in six towns.

"The truth is the most important thing, regardless of how dark it is," the letter said. "Serbia should stand together with countries where it is possible to live honestly, happily and in a satisfactory way."

The OSCE findings are not legally binding but they present Mr Milosevic with a stark choice. If he accepts them, they could provide a face-saving way out of the deadlocked confrontation. If he ignores the judgment, he will make it clear that he would rather resume the role of international pariah than share even a token slice of power.

The former Spanish prime minister, Felipe González, who led an OSCE mission to Serbia last month, said the opposition Zajedno (Together) coalition had won local polls in 13 disputed cities and towns and in nine Belgrade municipalities.

Mr González said the Serbian courts annulled the results on the basis of arguments "that no democratic country could have accepted". His report recommended that the 53-nation OSCE issue an urgent call on the authorities "to implement the will of the citizens as expressed in the polls". Mr González asked Mr Milosevic for a response this week.

"There exists an extraordinary opportunity for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to solve this concrete problem, to initiate real democracy in the country, and to reintegrate itself into the international community," said Mr González.

Diplomats say economic sanctions, lifted after the Bosnian peace agreement in 1995, could be reimposed if he refuses to compromise. Russia, however, has opposed the use of further international pressure.

There were signs last weekend that the regime may be preparing to give way over the elections when Mr Milosevic's mouthpiece, the socialist newspaper Politika, published the ruling by the mediators.

The United States has urged Belgrade to "show restraint". "We continue to hold Milosevic responsible for any violence which may occur," the state department said. The British embassy said that further moves to impede demonstrations would damage Serbia's chances of reintegration into the international community.

Austria	AS30	Malta	50c
Belgium	BF75	Netherlands	G 4.75
Denmark	DK16	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 13	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 400	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,000	Switzerland	SF 3.30

More facts need to be digested about food

YOUR leader (Protect the food chain, December 22) draws attention to a matter that has been of concern to the Royal Society of Health for some time — the need to separate the interests of the consumers of food products from those of producers, processors and distributors, and the introduction of a mandatory training and/or certification for food handlers.

Food poisoning is the classic example of a wholly preventable disease. We now run accreditation schemes designed to improve standards in many different parts of the food chain, provide one of the Government's mandatory training courses for meat inspectors, and are collaborating with major companies in the food industry in the development of voluntary standards for the accreditation of, for example, food packaging and transportation.

Mandatory certification of food handlers is practicable and desirable, and need not be financially burdensome. Education and training are the key but we need the legislative tools, the resources and the political will to do it.
Gavin Maxwell
Chairman of Council,
The Royal Society of Health,
London

I WAS amused by Stephen Bates's article "Trade clash looms on maize" (December 15). The strong reaction by some members of the European Union against the import of genetically engineered maize again emphasises the need for greater public education on the techniques used in generating transgenic plants and on what goes into them. Only then can the public and its government make informed choices about what they want to eat.

To this end it was unfortunate that the bacterial antibiotic resistance gene in question was quoted as being "used to protect the plant from disease and pests". I feel certain that in the genetic engineering of these plants the antibiotic resistance gene has only been used as a "selectable marker", designed to accompany and select for another foreign gene which actually confers the trait desired in the plant.

This latter trait was probably insect resistance, conferred by introduction of a gene coding for an insecticidal protein toxin from another bacteria, *Bacillus thuringiensis* (or Bt as it is better known).

Although this may seem like scientific detail, the exact cause of perceived or potential risk is important. The public needs to know whether concerns are for the spread of the antibiotic resistance marker gene from the plant to other organisms (eg transfer of antibiotic resistance between different bacteria) or for the non-target effects of the insecticidal toxin itself.
R ffrench-Constant
Madison, Wisconsin, USA

'CONTROVERSY' about BSE (mad cow disease) shows how public opinion, when aroused, takes on a life of its own. People focus on BSE but ignore the correlation between eating beef and heart failure, eating beef and cancer, eating beef and the ecological damage incurred from large-scale ranching.

Unfortunately, public opinion is seldom rational. Controversy about gun control is another example. People focus on eliminating handguns and ignore the futility of outlawing responsible ownership, its costs, the consequences for some 20,000 citizens plus the gunsmiths and other businesses that face ruin.

Such controversies reflect the stupidity of the public at large. I include myself in this group because I am hoping for honest, sensible government. Unfortunately, politicians and their electors exhibit brains like those of the cows gone mad.
R S Frith
Vancouver, Canada

Standing up against mutilation

IT IS easy to see why attitudes about female genital mutilation are not changing when a teacher such as Hoda Abdelmoreed says that "Europe and the United States need it [female circumcision] more than we do. They wouldn't have Aids and all those other problems" (Egyptians stand by female circumcision, December 8).

Someone should point out to her that Africa has both one of the highest incidences of female genital mutilation and one of the highest incidences of Aids. Such mutilation is one of the saddest and most barbaric means of exerting control over women and it will not stop until women of Abdelmoreed's age, and of her position in society, stand up against it.
Kim Manning,
Bend, Oregon, USA

I APPLAUD the Guardian for running pieces such as "Egyptians stand by female circumcision". However, I am troubled by the inaccuracy of the term "female circumcision", which is a grievous misnomer for what is more accurately "genital mutilation".

Since male circumcision involves only the removal of extraneous skin, it should refer to a parallel operation on females. The surgery described in the article is not limited to the removal of unnecessary skin. By labelling this potentially devastating range of procedures "female circumcision", an inaccurate description of an invasive and dangerous ritual is perpetuated.
Kara K Lysne,
Ashibetsu-shi, Japan

That's enough multiculturalism

"*BLACK* looks and white lies" (December 22) is an admirable analysis of racial disharmony that is equally applicable in Australia, the more so because Yasmin Alibhai-Brown generally calls a spade a spade without the tyranny of political correctness that may inhibit white writers. In Australia particularly, the debate quickly becomes meaningless, with circumlocutions such as "indigenous people" for "Aborigines" and "ethnic community" for any people originating east of Calais — as though Anglo-Saxon and Celts do not belong to any racial group, nor have any ethnicity.

But, the most vaunted and least understood word used by Ms Alibhai-Brown is "multicultural". What does she mean by it? What do politicians mean? It is certainly more than "of several cultural groups" as defined in the Pocket Oxford Dictionary.

In Australia, "multiculturalism" as a slogan started life as the antithesis of White Australian Policy. Let us live and let live, and with good will we shall all gain from the infusion of new blood, cooking and ideas. Is that what it means? Or does it mean people from alien cultures have no obligation to assimilate into their new environment? No obligation to conform to any behavioural norms of their new country? Muslim dress in schools does not worry me, but if the *muezzin* insists on disturbing the whole neighbourhood with calls to prayer on the mosque PA system in the middle of the night, then I am going to object — even if I am a bell-ringer at the local parish church.

There are limits to tolerance and asserting them does not make one a racist. My wife is Indonesian, and may of my associates are middle-class Asians. On the other hand, I am intolerant of foul-mouthed plebeian whites. A snob? So be it.
Ted Webber,
Cairns, Queensland, Australia

Wrong about Hong Kong

I WRITE in reference to the letter by Elsie Tu (December 15), who says your paper is "biased" in its coverage of Hong Kong, as it raises issues that need a rebuttal.

First, with regard to the governor, Chris Patten, Ms Tu says that he is an "old friend" of John Major. That may be so but I am sure Mr Patten has not received $120 million from his mentor as Tung Chee-hwa, our new chief executive-elect, did from China in the late 1980s — to save his bankrupted business. Such a fact raises huge questions over Mr Tung's independence *vis-à-vis* his Chinese masters. Obviously, Ms Tu's omission of this matter is merely an oversight.

Second, it is manifestly false to claim, as Ms Tu does, that Mr Patten has shown "no interest in the Far East". No doubt Mr Patten and his entourage would be surprised by such an assertion, bearing in mind that he seems to be abroad on a regular basis fighting Hong Kong's corner with regard to passport rights, trade, etc.

Such a criticism stems, I believe, from personal animosity and bears no relation to the facts. As for breaching the Basic Law, it is well known that most breaches of this document have stemmed from Beijing — including the establishment of the so-called Provisional Legislature. I am curious as to why Ms Tu forgot to mention that, despite losing in the elections last year, she is now trying to by-pass the voter's choice by applying to join this wholly non-democratic charade. Perhaps democracy only counts when you win? But as someone who recently claimed Tibet is an "integral part of China", Ms Tu's grasp of democratic norms and self-determination may be a bit shaky.

Third, I would like to rebut the assertion that "the breakdown", as Ms Tu calls it, may be placed at the Hong Kong government's door. This is wrong. The problem stems from the Basic Law being interpreted by China in a manner that is wholly different from anyone else — including by many of the Hong Kong people's democratically elected representatives in the Legislative Council.
Ian Taylor
Pok Fu Lam, Hong Kong

Comment, page 8
Washington Post, page 12

Briefly

"*RELUCTANTLY*, I pursued my commercial argument against African logic." Lacville's column, is unfailingly paternalistic, oozing amused, headshaking despair over Africa's and Africans' hopelessness.

With a couple of deft brushstrokes he paints a portrait of the eldest son of the bereaved family as a simpleton. The young man's statements are those of a five-year-old — although he has completed three years' training as a welder at a technical college. He beams with pride and exclaims "Now I am a real welder". Lacville then teaches him the rudiments of commerce by suggesting he have a "family pocket" on one side of his clothing and a "business pocket" on the other.

Why does the Guardian Weekly seek to enlighten readers about Africa through the voice of a European? There are hundreds of journalists in African countries. Let's hear the story from them.
Alison Martin Katz,
Aire, Switzerland

THANKS for your article on the World Trade Organisation (December 15). It makes for scary reading. I wonder how many of New Zealand's politicians and journalists will read it. For so many of them, daring to question any aspect of globalisation is an act of heresy or subversion.
Lois Griffiths,
Christchurch, New Zealand

IN "Celts reverse the tide of history" (December 15) Cal McCrystal refers to "Welsh Gaelic". Shudders! What a contradiction in terms. Celtic languages may be Brythonic (Welsh, Cornish, Breton) or Goidelic (Scottish or Irish Gaelic, Manx) but never both. The article is another example of the genre that nothing happens in the Celtic world until the Irish notice it. Arguably, the resurgence of Welsh began with the formation of the Urdd movement in 1939. It was well under way during my Welsh school days (1937-51) and given added impetus by the Gittins Report of 1967.
D J Robinson,
Paremata, New Zealand

WITH reference to Michael White's article (December 15), does Viscount Cranborne seriously believe his hereditary colleagues were acting as disinterested "amateurs" on the day they turned up *en masse*, some for the first and only time, at the House of Lords to vote through the Poll Tax legislation? Like many others far-removed from the leftwing of the Labour party, I have believed in the need for reform of the Upper House since that day, when its powers were so shamelessly abused.
Joseph Pestell,
Paziols, France

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Letters to the Editor and other editorial correspondence to: The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ.
Fax: 44-171-242-0985 (UK: 0171-242 0985); e-mail: weekly@guardian.co.uk.

Moscow welcomes China trade pact

David Hearst in Moscow

RUSSIA signed a wide range of agreements on the transfer of nuclear and military technology to China last week, hoping to use Beijing as a counterweight to Nato expansion.

President Boris Yeltsin, who was back at work after his long recovery from open-heart surgery, held a 50-minute meeting with the Chinese prime minister, Li Peng.

In comments clearly directed at Washington, a presidential spokesman, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, said the two leaders had agreed that the future political map of the world should be a "bipolar one which is not divided into leaders and those who are being led".

It was also pointed out that Mr Li was the first foreign visitor to see Mr Yeltsin since he returned to the Kremlin after a sixth-month absence, and that a visit by the Chinese president, Jiang Zemin, would follow in April.

Mr Yeltsin, eager to present himself with a foreign policy success after so many setbacks with Nato, said: "Our strategic agreements reached in Beijing work."

As an indication of the two countries' determination to forge closer links, it was announced that the Russian prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, would meet Mr Li twice a year, to parallel the contacts already established with the United States vice-president, Al Gore.

The two sides also set themselves a target of raising the annual trade turnover to as much as $10.3 billion this year. The sale of Russian military and nuclear hardware will be at the forefront of the new Sino-Russian relationship.

The Chinese prime minister also signed a protocol on building a gas centrifuge plant for processing uranium in China. A similar project to sell gas centrifuge technology to Iran caused a serious rift between Moscow and Washington more than a year ago. Another initial agreement was signed to build a light-water nuclear power station, a VVER 1000, in China.

In the military field, China has already bought 48 Sukhoi 27 fighters from Russia and is negotiating a licence to build 200 more. It has also bought two Kilo-class diesel submarines and ground-to-air anti-aircraft missiles.

However, major problems remain in the relationship. Mr Yeltsin and President Jiang are due to sign an agreement with the presidents of the former Soviet republics of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on withdrawing troops along the 4,150km border, but the negotiations remain highly sensitive.

The issue of ceding land to China, which was once the cause of fierce and bloody border clashes, is particularly contentious in Primorski Krai, the Russian region closest to it. With the rise of the nationalist Alexander Lebed, Mr Yeltsin may be forced to tread more cautiously with China.

The hard currency on offer in these deals is a big incentive for Russia. Its ultimate aim is to build a gas and oil pipeline to China and participate in the construction of the world's largest hydro-electric dam, on the Yangtze river.

But China is reluctant to put up the money and is anxious to see as little cash as possible involved in the multi-billion dollar deals.

Mr Yeltsin, however, is keen to have the summit in April, which would be a foreign policy success, in contrast to his administration's gradual acquiescence in the eastwards expansion of Nato.

Both countries regard themselves as victims of the transition to a market economy and, starved of state orders and funds for conversion, are desperate to find new markets.

On the home front, Mr Yeltsin announced a big crackdown on Russia's huge alcohol industry to try to stem tax evasion and increase budget revenues.

"The state loses 2 trillion roubles ($365 million) per month because of the outrages in the alcohol market," Mr Yeltsin's chief of staff, Anatoly Chubais said.

● Mr Lebed, who has emerged as Russia's most powerful opposition figure, has announced he is forming a political "third force" to attract millions of voters who, he claims, are disappointed with communism and alienated by self-styled democrats.

Striking out at both Mr Yeltsin and the communist leader, Gennady Zyuganov, Gen Lebed declared in a newspaper interview that the main danger facing Russia was an inefficient government run by people prepared to make extreme decisions in their own interests.

Russian women sell vodka on a Moscow street. Bootleggers are estimated to cost the state $365 million a month PHOTO: DIMA KOROTAYEV

N Korea apologises to South

Andrew Browne in Seoul

IN A SOLEMN gesture of conciliation, the remains of 24 North Korean submarine intruders shot in South Korea were handed back across the border on Monday after Pyongyang apologised over the incident. The remains were sent home through the border village of Panmunjom, state media reported.

Seoul swiftly agreed to send home the remains after Pyongyang expressed "deep regret" last Sunday for the incursion by a North Korean submarine in September. It was an unprecedented statement of contrition towards the South.

The handover was arranged by the United States-led United Nations Command, which polices a ceasefire that ended the 1950-53 Korean War.

Of 26 North Koreans that landed from the vessel, 11 were found shot dead — apparently in a mass suicide — and 13 were killed by Southern forces during a massive manhunt. One was captured alive and one is still at large.

Seoul has said that it will not return the captured agent or the submarine, as Pyongyang has demanded.

President Bill Clinton hailed North Korea's apology as a move towards peace. "I am pleased that Pyongyang has pledged to prevent the recurrence of such an incident and has expressed its willingness to work with others for durable peace and stability on the Peninsula," he said in a written statement.

"I hope discussions can now begin to move forward on the four-party peace talks which President Kim Young-sam and I offered last April."

Mr Clinton and President Kim invited North Korea and China to take part in talks aimed at securing a lasting peace to replace the truce that ended the Korean War.

The submarine incursion put on ice the peace initiative, froze international food aid to the hungry North and stalled implementation of an agreement under which Pyongyang pledged to halt its nuclear weapons programme.

Pyongyang's apology was issued after US and North Korean officials hammered out acceptable wording during intense negotiating sessions in New York.

Officials and diplomats in New York and Washington expected the apology to result in steps to repair the damage to inter-Korean ties. These could include a pledge from South Korea to resume construction work soon on two civilian nuclear reactors in the North and a simultaneous promise from North Korea to resume disposing of spent nuclear fuel rods. — *Reuter*

Taliban advances north

Suzanne Goldenberg in New Delhi

TALIBAN forces pushed their enemies further from the Afghan capital, Kabul, last weekend in the first big advance they have made in weeks.

After a 24-hour artillery and rocket exchange, the Taliban — which captured Kabul three months ago and controls two-thirds of Afghanistan — moved their front line to 40km north of the capital.

Last Saturday the Uzbek warlord in the north, General Rashid Dostam, retaliated with bombing raids on Kabul and Taliban frontline positions.

The weekend's events follow a six-week deadlock between the Islamist militia and the bizarre opposition alliance of Gen Dostam, a former general in the Soviet-backed Afghan army, and Ahmed Shah Massoud, once a legendary mojahedin commander.

The Taliban advance brings it closer to Cmdr Massoud's stronghold in the Panjshir valley. Cmdr Massoud's forces retreated from the resort town of Stalif.

Taliban soldiers are now within 5km of the Bagram airbase held by Gen Dostam, which has been under fire for the past month. "Bagram airport has been paralysed," said Kahirullah Kherkhaw, the governor of Kabul province. He said Taliban tanks had blocked all roads leading to the base.

But the greatest casualty may be the morale of an opposition alliance founded on expediency. Gen Dostam and Cmdr Massoud found common cause only with the advance of the Taliban.

Last weekend dozens of bodies, wearing the uniforms of anti-Taliban forces, lay where they had fallen around Kalakan, 20km north of Kabul. A few were covered with blankets; several had banknotes or coins stuffed into their mouths — a sign of the Taliban's contempt for opponents they dismiss as mercenaries.

The Taliban said they had killed as many as 60 enemy troops, and lost three men. They also claimed to have taken more than 100 prisoners, and several dozen men could be seen aboard trucks heading towards Kabul.

Otherwise, the roads were given up to a procession of refugees who had deserted villages along the road leading further north to Bagram.

Norbert Holl, the United Nations envoy, has been shuttling between Afghanistan and Pakistan trying to broker a ceasefire. But the Taliban do not appear ready to compromise with Gen Dostam, who previously served the Soviet-installed government of Najibullah.

The Week

THE FBI arrested Earl Pitts, aged 43, one of its counter-espionage officials, on charges of spying for Moscow since 1987. He is said to have received at least $224,000.

A 49-YEAR-OLD woman who had been receiving psychiatric treatment, killed herself and two others in a Frankfurt church on Christmas Eve. German police have ruled out political or religious motives.

GREEK farmers voted to end their blockade of the country's main roads and railways, almost a month after launching their protest against austerity measures.

PRESIDENT Mobutu Sese Seko returned to Zaire after nearly a year in exile in France.
Comment, page 8

ABORIGINES have won an important legal victory in Canberra, paving the way for "traditional ownership" claims on a possible 40 per cent of Australia.

IRAQI authorities have arrested more than 600 army, party and government officials following the assassination attempt on Uday, the eldest son of President Saddam Hussein, according to the country's former intelligence chief.

THE Burmese opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, attended a wedding and visited a museum, but the authorities said she would need clearance on a "case by case" basis to leave her tightly guarded compound.

RIOTS rocked the Indonesian province of West Java in what appeared to be racially motivated violence by Muslims against local Christians and Chinese.

AN INTERNATIONAL agreement designed to reverse the desertification of arid land after two decades of deterioration has been signed in Geneva.

FRANCE is to withdraw from a Western air reconnaissance operation over Kurdish areas of northern Iraq — a decision that may prompt accusations that it wants to dominate future trade overtures with Baghdad.
Washington Post, page 11

BURMA's special trading status with the EU has been withdrawn because of concerns about the use of forced and slave labour.

FRENCH actress Brigitte Bardot appeared in a Paris court on charges of racism. She was being sued by anti-racism groups for "provoking racial discrimination and hatred" in two newspaper articles. Judgment was reserved until January 23.

Money talks loud but not so clear



The US this week

Martin Walker

THE ONLY credible defence to the charge that the American political system is fundamentally corrupted by money is that there is nothing hole and corner about the endemic peddling of financial influence. There are no secret price lists in the finest democracy money can buy, and the voters have not the slightest excuse if they decline to display concern.

A night in the Lincoln bedroom at the White House can be yours for a mere $250,000 payment into Democratic party funds. It is not clear whether the price includes breakfast with the First Family, but another $100,000 should ensure that. Unless one would rather spend the $100,000 on an invitation to one of the dozens of quiet dinners with the president at the Jefferson hotel.

Clinton, who said at the start of his drive for the White House in October 1991 that "the first primary is money", has fought campaigns rich, and fought them poor — and he knows which he prefers. In 1995-96 he used funds to intimidate any prospective Democratic challenger out of a primary tussle, and to buy television time in the year before the election to drive up his own opinion poll ratings and depress those of the Republicans.

He is the master of the art of turning cash into votes, a genuine innovator whose example will doubtless be followed by all his successors.

The Reagan administration of the 1980s was credited with turning the daily work of the presidency into a permanent political campaign. Clinton has taken this to the logical conclusion of mounting the permanent presidential fund-raising operation. He evidently resolved to miss no opportunity to top up the campaign warchest, and he must now know that he has brought the White House into something wretchedly close to disrepute.

The cartoonists who display the presidential mansion with a placard saying "For Sale", or a neon motel sign flashing "Vacancies" are bang on target. We would be drawing parallels with the corrupt administrations of presidents Ulysses Grant and Warren Harding were it not for the openness of it all, and for the equally unsavoury embarrassments of the Republican Speaker, Newt Gingrich.

Just before Christmas, Gingrich admitted to the House Ethics Committee that he had misled them about a college course he taught and financed through a tax-exempt foundation. Being tax-exempt, it should have been an apolitical course. It was not. He also claimed his political organisation, Gopac, was not involved with the course. It was.

The Republicans are closing ranks behind their Speaker, and he looks likely to be re-elected next week by a partisan vote. This is exactly what the Democrats and the White House want, to be confronted by an ethically bruised and chastened Speaker, whose presence stands as a constant reproach to Republican attempts to pursue Clinton for his own embarrassments.

Gingrich's public apology may not end the matter. The evidence gathered by the Ethics Committee inquiries has unveiled offences that may lead the Internal Revenue Service to bring its own charges. And Gingrich's operations have involved what looks like the unprincipled looting of some charities. His Earning by Learning scheme, which pays $2 to inner-city children for each book they read, has delivered less than one-third of the money raised to children. More than half went to a consultant, Mel Steely, a biographer and adviser to Gingrich.

Then there was the Abraham Lincoln Opportunity Foundation, another tax-exempt charity to help inner-city children. Between 1990 and 1993 it raised $259,000, almost all of which went to fund TV workshops to recruit and train conservative activists. This sticks in the throat when one recalls the pious speeches Gingrich makes about "the bloated bureaucracy of the welfare state".

On the basis of what has been learned from the Ethics Committee, many in the inner city might settle for a bureaucracy that simply protects them from the devious ways of



politicians such as Gingrich, who divert money intended for children to their own partisan purposes. But Gingrich has a policy for that, too. The Federal Electoral Commission, which is meant to regulate and police political finance, last year said that it needed $33.6 million to enforce the law. It saw its budget cut by 16 per cent by Gingrich's Republicans.

The real affront of the campaign finance system was memorably defined by journalist Michael Kinsley when he noted that the scandal was not what was illegal, but what was legally permitted. By any measure, the costs of sustaining US democracy have sky-rocketed in the 1990s. The presidential election campaign alone went from $311 million in 1992 to $800 million last year, figures compiled by the Centre for Responsive Politics show.

Take the new flavour of the political season, the unregulated "soft money" intended to finance politically neutral projects to educate the voters on the issues, and to support voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts. The Federal Election Commission (FEC) says soft money donations grew from $83 million in 1991-92 to $223 million in 1995-96.

BUT VOTER turnout fell from 55 per cent in 1992 to less than 50 per cent last year: the more the politicians spend to lure voters, the less voters go to the polls.

This soft money dwarfs the $62 million in public funds given to each of the main party candidates by the FEC this year, and the $30 million given to Ross Perot's Reform party.

Four of the top 10 soft money donors to the Republicans were tobacco companies. Evidently hoping to protect their interests against the restrictions being urged by Clinton, Philip Morris ($1.6 million) and RJR-Nabisco ($970,000) were in first and second place. Three of the top four donors to the Democrats came from Hollywood. Seagram-MCA was in the lead, with $620,000, the Disney group in third place, with $532,000, and Dreamworks fourth, with $525,000.

There is an intriguing symmetry to this process, with a big corporation's right hand understanding perfectly well what the left hand is doing. In addition to their generosity to Democrats, Seagram-MCA was also the sixth most-generous donors to the Republicans, paying $435,000. Hollywood likes Clinton, but Seagram sells booze, and wanted to soften political opposition to its plan to end the voluntary ban on advertising alcohol on television.

Atlantic Richfield gave $615,000 to the Republicans and $373,000 to the Democrats, in the hope that it might finally be allowed to develop the oil reserves in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve in Alaska. AT&T gave $417,000 to the Republicans and $326,000 to the Democrats: in the communications business, you need friends everywhere.

Last year, 34 groups gave more than $1 million in political contributions, in soft money, in donations to the PACs (political action committees), and to individual candidates. Of these, no fewer than 14 were trade unions, from the $2,097,410 of the Teamsters to the $1,006,060 of the United Transportation Union. Twelve of the million-dollar club were corporations, from the $2.7 million of Philip Morris to the $1.03 million of US Tobacco. Another eight were interest groups, from the $2.1 million of the Association of Trial Lawyers of America to the $1.06 million of the National Rifle Association and the American Institute of Chartered Public Accountants.

For much of this, we can thank the Supreme Court, which has decided that attempts to regulate campaign donations amount to restrictions on the First Amendment right to free speech.

In one sense, the costs of financing US politics are not excessive. Put together the presidential, congressional, statehouse and local races, and the total sum falls short of $3 billion. In a US economy whose gross domestic product will top $7.5 trillion this year, that is a flea bite, less than 0.04 per cent.

Since the overall sums are in the billions, the surprising feature is how little of the money comes from foreigners. John Huang, the Democrats' star fund-raiser among Asian-Americans, raised $4.6 million. More than half of that has now been returned as improper.

Just to keep this bipartisan, bear in mind that the Democrats have listed $2.4 million in foreign money that went to Bob Dole's campaign.

Foreign funds given to both parties total about $4.6 million, which sounds a sizeable sum. But it would not have been enough to finance the single Congressional campaign of Texas Republican Gene Fontenot to win his seat in the House of Representatives. It would not have financed even a quarter of the average Senate campaign in California.

Last year, 14 Senators retired, with a combined experience of 288 years between them. Every one said the biggest change in their political lives had been the ever-increasing amount of time and effort they needed to raise funds. The average Senate campaign now costs more than $5 million, which means raising $2,500 every day during a six-year term.

Clinton has taken this principle of the permanent begging bowl into the White House. Gingrich has taken it into his own area of innovation, the building of the personal political machine, recruiting team and political training structure of Gopac. And it is no accident that the two pre-eminent politicians of the day have each been pioneers in the use and abuse of fund-raising.

It is also no accident that their era should have seen the row about foreign finance invading US politics. If US companies are entitled to buy political influence in Washington, how, in an interdependent global economy, can a fair system exclude foreign-owned firms that create American jobs and pay American taxes, and whose investors and central banks finance nearly one-third of the US national debt? If US politicians who like to set the rules for global trade are so ready to be bought, they should be less squeamish — and less shocked — if they find foreigners are eager to pay.

Guatemalans get 'peace without justice'

Phil Gunson

ONE of the world's longest running wars officially ended last Sunday with the signing in Guatemala City of a peace treaty between the government of President Alvaro Arzú and the guerrillas of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG).

The war, which has been waged with varying degrees of intensity since November 1960, is generally believed to have cost about 220,000 lives and to have displaced 1 million people.

It began with an officers' revolt against the military regime led by General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, installed after a 1954 coup backed by the United States. But it was not until more than 30 years later that the army formally returned to the barracks.

However, since the restoration of civilian rule in 1986, the process of putting an end to Central America's last big conflict has been protracted and halting.

The present peace process sponsored by the United Nations, which has cost millions of dollars, began in 1991 and the results have not been to everyone's satisfaction.

"The greater loser from the signing of the peace will be Guatemalan society," said a human rights advocate, Ronalth Ochaeta of the Catholic archdiocese, reflecting a widely held view that the agreement has reinforced the impunity of those who committed atrocities during the war.

Rigoberta Menchu, the Guatemalan indigenous leader who was awarded the Nobel peace prize, is among those who have formed an "alliance against impunity" to protest against the national reconciliation law passed in December, which establishes an amnesty.

"I am against a general amnesty," Ms Menchu said when the ceasefire was signed. "I think peace without justice is only a symbolic peace."

The amnesty law appears to rule out prosecution of those responsible for the army and police atrocities that cost thousands of lives, especially in the counter-insurgency massacres of the early 1980s.

Last week President Arzú hit out at human rights groups for criticising the accords. "There are other sectors from whom we had hoped for support and an unconditional response because for 36 years they had begged for peace in Guatemala," he said.

"When they saw it coming closer, they felt they were losing something and they were the ones who put up obstacles — but they can all be overcome."

And the URNG leader, Rodrigo Asturias, defended the treaty, saying "the costs of reconciliation are painful but necessary". The guerrilla commander said he believed that in time people would come to understand the "true meaning" of the accord.

The URNG, whose combatants probably number fewer than 2,000, intends to transform itself into a political party.

Israelis vow to remain in Hebron

Nicolas B Tatro in Jerusalem

THE Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, has rejected Palestinian demands for shared control of a disputed religious shrine in Hebron, saying that Israel alone will patrol the Tomb of the Patriarchs.

On the verge of an agreement over an Israeli troop withdrawal from most of Hebron, the last West Bank city under Israeli control, Mr Netanyahu also said last Sunday that Israelis would remain in Hebron "for ever".

The Palestinian negotiator, Hassan Asfour, said Mr Netanyahu's declaration "negates the spirit of peace".

Both sides say an agreement on turning over 80 per cent of Hebron to Palestinian control could be reached this week. The redeployment of Israeli troops was scheduled for March, but was delayed after a series of suicide bombings in Israel that killed 63 people.

The Israeli defence minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, said last Sunday after a meeting in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, that the agreement on the pullout could come early this week.

Mr Arafat said that negotiations would continue "on all - levels . . . to finish all standing problems".

A Palestinian source said progress was made in the meeting between Mr Arafat and Mr Mordechai, and that a summit between the Palestinian leader and Mr Netanyahu was expected on Tuesday. Before the meeting, Palestinian officials said Mr Arafat would insist on Israeli-Palestinian joint patrols at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, known to Muslims as the Ibrahimi Mosque.

At the moment, only unarmed Palestinian ushers are present at the site, where Israeli settler Baruch Goldstein opened fire on Muslim worshippers, killing 29, in February 1994.

Mr Netanyahu said that Israeli troops would remain in the centre of the city to protect the 500 Jewish settlers who live there amid 130,000 Palestinians, and to guard the Tomb. "The areas that include the Jewish quarter, the Jewish residents, and the Tomb of the Patriarchs, will remain under Israeli security control, complete security control," he said.

However, Mr Asfour said security arrangements around the Tomb have not yet been finalised. He said Palestinians were demanding joint-control measures, whether patrols or guards.

Mr Netanyahu, who has been facing mounting criticism from his rightwing constituency against withdrawal, also said that Jews would never leave Hebron. "Anybody who tells you that we are leaving Hebron is telling you a lie. We are there, and we are there to stay — for ever, for all time," he told a group of 350 visiting American college students. — *AP*

Washington Post, page 11

Turkey steps up mafia inquiry

Chris Nuttall in Ankara

TURKEY'S president, Suleyman Demirel, has ordered the acceleration of an official investigation into a case linking the state with organised crime, which is rapidly becoming the biggest political scandal in the history of the republic.

The media, helped by leaked documents, have driven the inquiry with daily revelations — described by the opposition as like 100 Watergates — surrounding a car crash.

A lorry driver who pulled out in front of a Mercedes travelling at an estimated 217kmh near the town of Susurluk on November 3 is on trial for careless driving. But many Turks see him as a national hero for what he unwittingly helped uncover.

The car was ripped open as it slid under the lorry, killing a police academy chairman and a gangster and his moll, and seriously injuring a senior politician. A cache of guns, silencers and surveillance equipment, and traces of cocaine, were found. The state was caught *in flagrante delicto* with organised crime.

A prosecutor has asked the justice ministry to lift the parliamentary immunity of Mehmet Agar, who was forced to resign as interior minister within days of the accident.

A police report said he had signed a gun licence found on the body of the dead gangster, Abdullah Catli. Mr Agar says the signature is a fake. Catli was wanted for the torture and murder of seven leftwing students in 1978 and was implicated in the 1981 assassination attempt on the Pope. In 1990 he had been helped to escape from a Swiss prison, where he was being held for heroin smuggling. According to leaked intelligence documents, he worked for the government, killing leftwing extremists and Kurdish separatists.

Catli was given a virtual state funeral, his coffin draped in a flag. The deputy prime minister, Tansu Ciller, caused a furore with her valediction: "We will always respectfully remember those who fire bullets or suffer wounds in the name of this country."

The opposition leader, Mesut Yilmaz has supplied evidence that up to 120 people directed by senior police were involved in killings, extortion and drug smuggling.

The new interior minister, Meral Aksener, has suspended the Istanbul police chief, his deputy, the head of special operations and three police officers during an investigation. The three officers allegedly confessed to killing a casino boss in July. They were merely reassigned as bodyguards to the MP who survived the car crash.

He is Sedat Bucak, a Kurdish warlord who receives £750,000 a month from the government to fight rival Kurdish separatists.

Le Monde, page 9

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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The Week in Britain James Lewis

Outrage as pro-Serb MP admits he was MI6 agent

HAROLD WILSON, when prime minister in the 1960s, promised that intelligence chiefs would stop using MPs as agents. But the practice evidently continues. Harold Elletson, a Tory MP and (unpaid) parliamentary private secretary to a Northern Ireland minister, was revealed to be acting as an agent for the intelligence service, MI6, working in eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and, during the conflict, in the former Yugoslavia.

After a visit to Yugoslavia in 1992, he notified his MI6 handlers that donations — more than £96,000 — were reaching the Conservative party from Bosnia, to be used in the general election of that year. It was the same year that Mr Elletson himself was elected to Parliament. He had been recruited by MI6 some years before, and there was no suggestion that he acted improperly at any time.

Mr Elletson was part of a pro-Serb faction in Parliament and denounced the former Tory leader, Margaret Thatcher, in no uncertain terms when she called for Britain to help the Bosnians. Some might say his role in telling MI6 about the Serb money was a praiseworthy one. But there were demands that links between MPs and the security services should be recorded. And, once again, that the Conservative party should publish its accounts.

THE DISGRACED former Guinness chairman, Ernest Saunders, welcomed a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights that he had not been given a fair trial when he was accused of share-price rigging.

His five-year sentence for that offence was halved on appeal. He was released after only 10 months after claiming he was suffering from presenile dementia.

The Strasbourg court held that Mr Saunders's right not to incriminate himself had been infringed at his 1990 trial, and this will force an urgent review of Britain's law on corporate fraud. But the judges threw out compensation claims of nearly £4.7 million. The Serious Fraud Office vowed to resist any attempt to overturn the original conviction.

THE PARENTS of two British nurses charged with murdering an Australian colleague in Saudi Arabia insisted that their daughters were not guilty and that the Government should provide them with the best possible legal representation.

Lucille McLaughlan, aged 31, of Dundee, and Deborah Parry, aged 41, from the Midlands, have been charged with the murder of a theatre nurse, Yvonne Gilford, who was found dead on December 11. Under *sharia* law, they could be executed if they are found guilty of premeditated murder and the victim's family does not appeal for clemency.

As in the past, however, Britain will tread warily in its relations with Saudi Arabia. Local press reports that the women had confessed to the killings were described by the Foreign Office as "speculative". But the British consul-general in Riyadh said the embassy could not interfere in Saudi judicial procedures.

Expatriate games, page 16

THE DUKE of Edinburgh landed himself in trouble again when he wandered into the gun controversy and said that members of shooting clubs were no more dangerous than members of a squash club or golf club. "If a cricketer, for instance, suddenly decided to go into a school and batter a lot of people to death with a cricket bat, which he could do very easily, are you going to ban cricket bats?"

The Queen's husband, who is more than usually gaffe-prone, was making a reasonable point: that the banning of handguns in the wake of the Dunblane tragedy penalises the law-abiding members of gun clubs and might not be the most effective way of preventing another mindless slaughter. But his crass way of expressing himself infuriated anti-gun campaigners and the bereaved parents of Dunblane, who demanded an immediate apology.

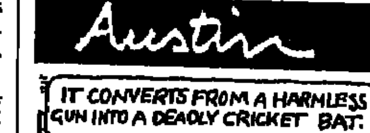
He later apologised, even though two phone-in polls suggested public backing for the view that a complete ban on handguns was an over-reaction to the events at Dunblane.

The Prime Minister was silent on the affair, possibly because the handgun issue divides his party. But George Robertson, the shadow Scottish secretary who lives at Dunblane, was scathing. The duke's views, he said, were those of "a very uninformed old man; the views of one aristocrat based on a completely crazy comparison".

A JUDGE took the unusual step of granting bail to a woman accused of murder so that she should be free to spend Christmas with her family. Police objected, but failed to overturn the decision.

Tracey Andrews, aged 27, is alleged to have stabbed her fiance, Lee Harvey, aged 25, to death in an isolated country lane near their home in Worcestershire. She claimed, however, that it was a "road rage" killing, and that her fiance had been attacked by a passenger in a Ford Sierra car that followed them from a public house.

The police initially accepted that explanation and a tearful Ms Andrews, facially injured, appeared before TV cameras to appeal for witnesses. Later, however, they charged her with murder and said there was forensic evidence to link her with the killing.





Bomb puts Ulster on brink

David Sharrock

NORTHERN Ireland was on a knife-edge as it waited to learn if the attempted murder of a leading republican last week signalled the end of the loyalist paramilitaries' two-year ceasefire and the resumption of tit-for-tat killing.

Loyalist and nationalist politicians both claimed that the attack on Eddie Copeland, who was rushed to hospital with leg wounds when a booby-trap bomb went off under his car on December 21, was in response to the IRA's gun attack on RUC officers guarding a Unionist politician and his wife who were visiting their critically ill child in Belfast's Royal Hospital for Sick Children on December 20.

There was no immediate claim for planting the device. However, loyalist sources indicated their belief that it was the work of either the Ulster Volunteer Force or the Ulster Freedom Fighters.

Loyalists have repeatedly warned that their paramilitary ceasefire could not be sustained against repeated IRA attacks.

David Adams of the Ulster Democratic Party, which is linked with the illegal UFF, said: "Loyalists have withstood provocation since Canary Wharf in February, and with that provocation continuing it seemed only a matter of time before there was a response."

David Ervine of the Progressive Unionist Party, which has links with the UVF, warned: "I think it is potentially the beginning of a spiral." He pledged: "I will attempt to exert whatever influence I can to say it's wrong — for the simple reason that we, the loyalists, have addressed the fears over the last two years of the Catholic, nationalist community. The IRA have singularly failed to do that."



The army patrols Ardoyne in West Belfast where a leading republican, Eddie Copeland, was injured by a car bomb

Joe Hendron, the SDLP MP for West Belfast, said the attack put "massive" pressure on the IRA to renew its ceasefire. "It looks like a reprisal for the shooting in the children's hospital," he said.

Dr Hendron added that if loyalists did return to violence, the IRA must share the blame. "If innocent Catholics or innocent people are killed out on the streets there, the IRA cannot throw up its hands and say: 'It was nothing to do with us'... All of these events put massive pressure on the Republican leadership to call a credible ceasefire."

The Ulster Unionist Party's security spokesman, Ken Maginnis, said the Stormont all-party talks would probably collapse if the loyalists went back to war.

The Northern Ireland minister, Malcolm Moss, said he utterly condemned the bomb attempt. "There is no difference between the people who used guns in a children's hospital . . . and those who planted the device in a man's car."

Comment, page 8

Poll finds support falling for European Union

Stephen Bates in Brussels

FEWER than half the inhabitants of the European Union now see their country's membership as a good thing, and one in six would vote to leave, according to a wide-ranging survey of attitudes, compiled by the EU's own statisticians.

Although nearly two-thirds of the 16,300 people questioned earlier this year across all 15 member states would still vote to remain in the EU if confronted by a referendum, the percentage supporting the principle of the EU has for the first time in 15 years dropped below 50 per cent.

The trend showing support for the union down to 48 per cent — six points down from the autumn of last year — has continued since 1990. The survey was carried out in April and May, at the height of the BSE crisis and the start of the Government's policy of non-co-operation.

The six-monthly Eurobarometer poll questions 1,000 people in each member state, with the exception of the UK, where an extra 300 are polled in Northern Ireland; Germany, where 1,000 are questioned in both the old western and eastern halves; and Luxembourg, where only 500 are polled.

The findings show Britain to be among the more Eurosceptical nations, though there are sharp regional variations. Overall in the UK, 41 per cent believed membership to be a good thing and 21 per cent believed it to be bad. By comparison, 46 per cent of the Germans questioned favoured the union as a good thing and 13 per cent opposed, while in France the figures were 53 per cent to 13 per cent, exactly the EU average.

The pollsters found much higher levels of support for the EU in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland than generally in England, but only the Thames Valley counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire registered more than the average percentage level of support across the EU as a whole: 55 per cent in favour of the EU compared with 23 per cent against.

South Yorkshire was the only region — narrowly — with more people in favour of leaving than staying in (31 per cent to 30 per cent).

The poll found that the populations of most member states remained heavily in favour of remaining in the EU, but there are signs of big drops in support in Belgium (down 17 per cent), Germany (down 14 per cent), and Denmark (down 11 per cent).

The three newest members, Finland, Sweden and Austria, are registering the lowest levels of support for the EU.

The greatest levels of enthusiasm are in Ireland, where 75 per cent of those polled believe membership to be a good thing and only 4 per cent are against.

Railtrack sits on £700m

Keith Harper

RAILTRACK, the privatised monopoly that runs the country's track and signals, has been severely reprimanded by the railway watchdog and told to put its house in order within a month after failing to invest £709 million of government money in Britain's rail system.

In an unusually outspoken rebuke, John Swift, the rail regulator, warned Railtrack's chairman, Robert Horton, that the current level of underspend was "totally unacceptable".

The investment warning follows a series of reprimands for privatised utilities over levels of investment. The electricity regulator is studying his industry's investment record and last month the water watchdog hit out at companies over their spending.

Meanwhile government figures have revealed that taxpayers gave the privatised railway industry a gravy train start by doubling state aid to almost £2 billion in the first 12 months after privatisation.

They show that British Rail received £1.035 billion from the Treasury to run the railway in 1993-94, its last full year. By 1994-95, when the Government started the sell-off, the figure had jumped to just under £2 billion.

The figures suggest the handouts were to reach a peak last year before dropping to £1.2 billion by 2000.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
January 5 1997

In Brief

LOBBYIST Ian Greer, the central figure in the parliamentary sleaze scandal, has declared his three main companies are insolvent. He has called in accountants to prepare for liquidation.

WANDSWORTH is the second Conservative council to be found guilty of operating an unlawful housing sales policy by selling empty flats instead of offering them to the homeless.

ENVIRONMENTAL protesters trying to stop construction of the Exeter-Honiton bypass in Devon were caught on the hop when bailiffs took one hour to evict a camp they had taken two years to build.

A BLANKET ban on journalists interviewing inmates in prison was ruled illegal by the High Court as an unjustified interference with the right of free speech.

PROBATION officers visiting prisons throughout England and Wales have walked out in protest at "humiliating" intimate body searches.

A POLICEMAN investigating Scotland's food poisoning outbreak is suspected of being infected with the *E. coli* bacteria that has resulted in 16 deaths.

THE Government is preparing to tackle one of the most serious grievances of the Muslim community by agreeing for the first time to provide full state funding for an Islamic school in Brent, north London.

POLICE officers who are freemasons should be forced to record their membership in an open register to dispel suspicions about favouritism and divided loyalties, the Police Complaints Authority proposed.

LABOUR demanded a government statement on the sixth suicide in 15 months at Cornton Vale, Scotland's only women's prison.

THE number of alleged illegal immigrants detected in the UK rose by 40 per cent in 1995, according to Home Office figures.

ALMOST three-quarters of local authorities questioned in a survey admit there is "bed-blocking" in hospitals because there are patients ready for discharge who cannot be moved out as they are awaiting care arrangements by social services.

A GIRL aged six was killed as she switched on the fairy lights of a Christmas tree.

TED LEADBITTER, Peter Mandelson's predecessor as Labour MP for Hartlepool for 28 years, has died at the age of 77.

Ride on by . . . Racehorses gathered on the gallops at Middleham Moor beneath the Pennine for exercise as all racing on turf in England fell foul of frost and snow. Frozen weather and a light dusting of snow brought chaos to roads throughout the country PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN GILES

Tories caught cheating in crucial vote

Michael White

THE Government brazenly shrugged off Labour and Liberal Democrat outrage after the discovery that Tory whips had cheated the opposition over the votes of three MPs in order to guarantee victory on December 16 in the tight Commons debate on fishing policy.

A Labour amendment was defeated by 316 votes to 305 after the Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, confirmed that Britain would hold out over plans by other European Union states to modernise the community unless quota-hopping rules were changed.

In a classic piece of parliamentary skullduggery ahead of the crucial vote, three ailing or absent Tory MPs were first "paired" with absent Liberal Democrats, then also paired with Labour MPs unable to be at the Commons — a sleight of hand that prompted opposition leaders to suspend the system.

"The pairing system is built on trust. If trust is destroyed the system is unworkable," the two main opposition parties said in a statement that promised concerted action to ambush the Government repeatedly as John Major struggles towards the election without a majority.

The opposition retaliated, inflicting a defeat on the Government on December 17 on the Protection from Harassment Bill — the anti-stalking measure earlier given an unopposed second reading.

After the defeat, the Tory chairman, Brian Mawhinney, claimed: "At least 14 Labour MPs promised they would not vote, then did. This is dishonourable conduct but typical of New Labour's lust for power."

At the heart of the row was a routine, if arcane, transaction designed to allow MPs and ministers to travel away from Westminster or be sick by "pairing" one absentee against another. No formal rules exist, only long-standing conventions.

Tempers rose when the Labour Chief Whip, Donald Dewar, and Archy Kirkwood, his Liberal Democrat counterpart, realised they could have won the December 16 vote by 317 to 316 if the three improperly paired MPs and the nine Official Ulster Unionists — who abstained — had all voted with the opposition.

Instead of the "resounding success" that ministers promptly claimed, a defeat could have triggered a no confidence vote against Mr Major — hence the anger. It was fuelled by the belief that the Tory whip, Derek Conway, must have known what he was doing when he paired Walter Sweeney, Terry Dicks and Sir Keith Speed with both sides.

The Ulster Unionist leader, David Trimble, confirmed it was only 20 minutes before the 10pm vote that the Unionists decided to abstain, having obtained concessions on fishing policy.

"We find it impossible to believe that the double pairing could be accidental," the Dewar-Kirkwood statement said after a formal protest to the Tory Chief Whip, Alastair Goodlad.

What startled MPs was that ministers, led by the Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, defended the tactic. The brazen ministerial response led to a suspension of all contacts through the "usual channels" between the parties.

● Tony Baldry, the fisheries minister, emerged from prolonged talks in Brussels to claim victory in EU negotiations to set the size of next year's catch for British fishermen, after securing a deal that will increase the amount of fish caught by 23,000 tonnes.

"We have achieved all we could have wished. Every part of the UK fishing fleet has a reason to feel their objectives have been met," he said.

The commission, which has been anxious to cut drastically the amount of fish being caught to conserve stocks, backed away from proposing severe reductions in many areas after a bruising year of confrontation with a number of member states.

BBC wins funding battle

Andrew Culf

THE wreath tied to railings outside BBC World Service headquarters at Bush House in central London has been quietly removed and the threat of closure of six language services has receded after the BBC won a battle with the Foreign Office to protect its funding.

Sam Younger, the service's managing director, who considered resigning over the peremptory restructuring of the service by John Birt, the BBC director general, has unveiled a five-year strategy that involves hauling the service into the 21st century.

The controversial restructuring — which prompted employees and the Guardian to launch Save the World Service campaigns — is going ahead, with additional safeguards agreed between the BBC and the FO.

Its news operation is to be merged with the BBC's domestic news directorate, and English language programmes will be merged with domestic radio production. But the tensions have eased and the staff are now looking ahead.

Although the Government announced an extra £5 million of Foreign Office grant-in-aid in the November Budget, the World Service could still face a £40 million funding gap over five years.

For the foreseeable future most of the service's 140 million listeners will tune in on crackly short wave or local stations rebroadcasting its output. The aim, however, is to use developing digital satellite technology to fill in poorly served areas and to launch a second World Service channel broadcasting 24-hour news.

Caroline Thomson, deputy managing director for the service, said use of the Internet could be of critical importance in broadcasting Cantonese services in the run-up to China's takeover of Hong Kong on July 1, when radio services could be jammed.

The £5 million additional funding has halted the immediate threat to jobs, beyond the 100 already axed, although dire warnings before the Budget were not "shroud waving".

She admitted the restructuring was not the smoothest process imaginable. "Some staff are positively enthusiastic, while others are putting up with it. It would be unrealistic to expect anything else," she said.

Once a thug, always a thug

PRESIDENT MOBUTU Sese Seko has been allowed to rape his country for the past 30 years with Western connivance on the basis of one simple, wicked, rationale. He may be a thug, said the CIA/mining corporations/white South Africans/French/Israelis and others. But at least he's our thug. His use to Washington as a conduit for dirty tricks and destabilisation ended with the cold war. So he was handed down to the French like a grubby suit. He has now been resuscitated to wreak more havoc on the unfortunate Zaireans. Another perverse rationale in his defence is being revived even as he and his entourage return, laden with luxury goods.

For better or for worse, it is claimed, Mobutu has held the country together for a very long time. This claim is accompanied by the geopolitical nudge-and-wink that Zaire is a country of huge strategic and economic significance to the West. Yes, he may be hated by most of his people; but Africa is a continent whose people require a strong hand if existing frontiers are to remain sacrosanct.

This perverse version of history comes close to echoing Mobutu's own claim that "there was no Zaire before me, and there will be no Zaire after me". The reality is that as a result of Mobutu's misrule and massive extortion of the national wealth, the "state" of Zaire as an effective entity, measured by all the normal criteria, disappeared long before the recent Tutsi rising. Health, education, transport, justice and financial accountability have long been fragile or non-existent. Local regimes in other provinces such as East and West Kasai and Shaba barely listen to Kinshasa. Governors in league with the military run their own versions of their master's tyranny. Mobutu himself, before going to Europe for medical treatment, rarely set foot in his own capital, preferring a luxurious rural hideaway.

So Papa returned to a welcome variously described as "rapturous" and "ecstatic"? Many of those who welcome him have been organised, or paid, to do so. Some political opponents will have experienced a remarkable conversion for much the same reasons. If there are genuine popular hopes of a miracle as a result of his return, this only shows the desperation to which Zaire has been reduced. The policy of all outside powers should be based on strict neutrality, keeping Mobutu at a very long arm's length. Energetic measures should be taken to seek an arms embargo upon all supplies, to Kinshasa as much as the rebels. A final break-up of Zaire can hardly be worse than its present unhappy fate.

Give peace another try

THERE are two ways of responding to the latest events in Northern Ireland. One is to shrug the shoulders and assume that recent reciprocal attacks of republican on loyalist, and then of loyalist on republican, herald a long-feared downward spiral about which little can be done. The other way is to take the shootings and bombings as a combined warning and to do something to prevent that downward decline from getting worse.

The former response is in line with the fatalistic mood of the times and typifies the tentative spirit in which the British have played their part in wasting the opportunities of the last three years. The latter, by contrast, is the only one that offers hope to Northern Ireland. It remains the policy to which politicians of all parties ought to be committed.

The two incidents on the weekend of December 21 show that the paramilitaries on both sides of the sectarian divide are well-prepared for a more general collapse into violence. The IRA's gun attack in a children's hospital is shocking both for its ruthless pursuit of a political target at a time when Sinn Fein still hopes for inclusion in the talks process, as well as for a disregard of the danger to young, innocent lives. It showed the lengths to which the IRA is again prepared to go.

But so, too, did the loyalist booby trap car bomb against a top IRA man the following day. If nothing else, these incidents show just how dangerous it would be if an all-out exchange of assaults was now to begin. For the moment, though, that has not happened. Serious though the situation has become, it has not yet degenerated into a free-for-all. It is in the public interest that it does not, and there is still time to prevent it from doing so. For that to happen, however, British politicians need to recognise their own share of responsibility, too.

Unfortunately, there will be little or no political progress in Northern Ireland until after the British general election. This is humiliating for Northern Ireland but it is a recognition of realities. John Major is too weak to do anything that would offend the Ulster Unionists; but he is also too weak to stop them doing much that will offend him. However, Tony Blair does not have any motive to initiate either. There are no Tory marginals in Northern Ireland, and Mr Blair fears doing anything that will allow the Tories to cast him as the terrorists' friend.

Northern Ireland therefore faces six months of drift. The Tories must recognise that their praiseworthy efforts in Northern Ireland have not worked. But they must not now do anything that will make the job of the next government — which could, after all, be a Tory one — any harder. Mr Major, recently dumping on the latest Hume-Adams proposals, showed a sort of short-termism that must stop.

But Labour must not hide behind the Conservatives' coat-tails either. Labour needs to know what it intends in Northern Ireland and to signal its intentions authoritatively. No change is no option. Labour needs to move the spiral in the opposite direction even before it has the chance of taking office. At a grim time in Northern Ireland politicians must set their minds on peace-making.

Keeping an eye on Hong Kong

HONG KONG'S last months before it returns to the motherland will be anxious ones. By appointing a Provisional Legislature (ProvLeg) to supplant the one elected in 1995, China has ensured a difficult as well as bizarre political transition. The real Legislative Council (LegCo) will continue to meet in Hong Kong while the ProvLeg convenes under red banners. More than half the members of one already belong to the other. How will they deal with conflicting proposals? It makes a farcical and worrying start to what is supposed to be a new age of confidence.

Hong Kong has become much more politically aware since the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, but it is beginning to drift back to a mood of cynical acceptance. Accommodation to Beijing may for many become the only realistic option. It will, for example, be much better for Hong Kong if the widely admired current chief secretary, Anson Chan, keeps her job as No 2 after the handover, and as many other senior civil servants as possible, even if they have come to terms with the ProvLeg.

Chris Patten was right to describe the election of the ProvLeg as a farce in which members of the Selection Committee voted for one another and themselves in an absurd charade of democracy. But once again he expressed himself in a manner that will impress few in Hong Kong and no one in Beijing. Analogies with the choice of a tennis club committee are better suited to the voters of Bath.

The strong protest delivered by the Foreign Secretary is a different matter. Malcolm Rifkind was right not to criticise the selection by Beijing (through its handpicked committee) of the new chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa. He is equally right to describe the new ProvLeg as not a legislature "constituted by elections" — as required by the Joint Declaration of 1984. And Beijing is wrong to claim that Britain has no legitimate interest in Hong Kong after the handover. The Joint Liaison Group will function till the end of 1999, after which Britain still has a special duty to ensure that this internationally recognised agreement is properly observed.

The people of Hong Kong must hope that Britain's words are now more than a formality for the record. Everyone must also hope that those in Beijing who understand the need for reassurance will quietly prevail. The Chinese government can, and should, confine the role of the ProvLeg to passing only the most urgent laws. Serious issues should be left to the new LegCo, which must be elected a year later. China also needs to clarify and confirm the election arrangements for this and future LegCos in its own Basic Law — which says half of the councillors will be directly elected in 2003, and that election of all members by universal suffrage is the "ultimate aim". The commitment is important because it offers hope that Hong Kong may still get there in the end.

No future for rebels trapped in the past

Richard Gott

THERE IS a long and honourable tradition of guerrilla activity in Latin America that has ebbed and flowed over decades and centuries. Independence from Spain in the early 1800s would never have been successful without the innumerable guerrilla armies that helped to put in place a new world order. Oligarchic, unrepresentative and authoritarian regimes have run most of the continent ever since.

More than a century later, in the 1960s and 1970s, guerrilla groups sprang up everywhere in the (usually) vain hope of repeating the success of the Cuban revolution.

So the Peruvian rebels who have reappeared in Lima with such a dramatic sense of theatre have plenty of forerunners. Indeed for long-term observers of the continent, there is a sense of having seen all this before: the seizure of hostages, the kidnapping of foreign diplomats, the ransom demands, the reading-out of obscure political manifestos. From Uruguay to El Salvador, from Argentina to Nicaragua, these were the steady spectaculars of the 1970s. Embassies strengthened their security, the CIA sent in their counter-insurgency and torture teams, and military dictatorships were installed to kill off a generation of young revolutionaries.

In one sense, the actions of the Peruvian group Tupac Amaru are a simple post-modern replay of the past. Today's rebels reinforce their revolutionary credentials by their willingness to refer back to the triumphs of their predecessors. Tupac Amaru himself sparked off a rebellion in 1780 that reached from the countryside into every Spanish town in the Andes. In the 1960s, Cuban-backed guerrillas invoking the image of Che Guevara tried to do the same, not just in Peru but all over the continent.

Yet today's revolutionaries seem to owe more to current abstruse theories about culture than to a detailed consideration of historical example. In the 1990s in Peru, and also in Mexico, we have been seeing the emergence of post-modern guerrilla movements that are rather different from those that appeared before. The iconography may look the same — the masks, the weapons, the red flags — but the ideology is different.

The aim of these armed bands is not to seize power and effect a revolution in society through armed struggle, defeating regular armies through guerrilla warfare. That would be a hopeless task. Their more simple purpose, using the weapons of imitation, parody and pastiche, is to cast doubt on the viability of the current neo-conservative ideology that spread its suffocating blanket over the entire continent. They hope to destabilise the governments of their countries and, from the ensuing chaos, to set them off on a new path.

These guerrillas use the same words and rhetoric as their forerunners, but their slogans have mostly lost their meaning. They still invoke the Cuban example, yet everyone knows that it is many years since Fidel Castro's regime gave anyone a helping hand. They claim to be fighting "imperialism", yet in the absence of the Soviet Union, which was once able to provide a counter-weight to the regional superpower, there is no possibility that local resistance movements will be allowed to survive.

Counter-insurgency techniques are infinitely more developed than they were 30 years ago. Much of Latin America's rural hinterland has been drained of population, and small anti-government armed groups can survive as local irritants only in obscure areas. While immense shanty towns can spawn endless recruits for rebel groups, there is no common culture of the kind that Islam provides for the revolutionaries of the Middle East. Even Peru's Sendero Luminoso has been hammered into the ground.

Nor is there now much opportunity to conduct the classic revolutionary war in which a guerrilla outburst sparks off a larger conflagration. In the case of Mexico, the localised guerrilla movement in the rural areas of Chiapas, on Mexico's border with Guatemala, failed to ignite much activity elsewhere.

The Zapatistas have been using the 20th century peasant leader Emiliano Zapata as their emblematic figurehead, in much the same way that the Peruvians have been iconising the 18th century rebel Tupac Amaru, but these talismanic invocations have had little effect. The notoriously compromised Mexican left has not been able to use the guerrilla challenge to unite its own political forces against the government. When the old and creaking political system in Mexico does break down it will be to the benefit of the right rather than the left.

THE OUTLOOK in Peru is equally pessimistic. Peru in the 1990s has been emerging from a 25-year period of crisis in which its traditions, its political institutions and society itself, have been dramatically transformed. The country in the process has tried every kind of political recipe, including socialism imposed by military fiat and populism enforced through charismatic corruption.

Springing from nowhere, and without party label or baggage, President Alberto Fujimori has imposed the standard economic programme of the new global world order. As everyone now recognises, this makes the rich richer and the poor poorer.

The grounds for dissatisfaction are legion, and groups such as Tupac Amaru have no difficulty in finding recruits. But the cards are stacked against them. Fujimori may get a bad press for closing down the country's congress, but he has received firm international support and remains popular at home.

The rebels' only real hope of securing change is through martyrdom, and the Japanese government — still uncomfortable with its role as a global political player — has been moving heaven and earth to prevent this. The original rebellion of Tupac Amaru was drowned by the Spaniards in blood. Hundreds of Indians were executed in the towns of the Andes, both in the morning and in the afternoon. It was a terrible warning, and there was silence for a generation. But then the Spaniards were gone.


Rescue workers evacuate the injured after the bombing of the Paris metro last month PHOTO PHILIPPE WOJAZER

France cannot disown links with Algeria

EDITORIAL

THE bomb attack that recently killed four people in the Paris metro, which is thought to be the work of Algerian fundamentalists, proved once again that France is inextricably involved in the Algerian civil war.

France and Algeria cannot afford to ignore each other. They are linked by too many bonds, by too much bloodshed. Any upheaval in Algeria has repercussions in France. Equally, Algeria cannot remain indifferent to the way that it is judged in Paris. There exists a reciprocal vulnerability that it would be futile to try to ignore.

This has been brought home to the French all the more forcefully now that those who lurk behind the GIA, or Armed Islamic Group (there may in fact be several groups), have threatened to carry out a fresh series of bombings in France.

In a two-page "message to the president of France, Jacques Chirac", published on December 24, Antar Zouabri, who heads the GIA, stated that "of all the heathens the French remain the most dangerous enemies of the Muslims" and that "we believe that when we cut off your heads, tear your bodies apart and disperse you, we are carrying out an act of worship that brings us closer to God".

The message urged France to halt "all support" for the Algerian government, and called for the release of a GIA member, Abdelhak Layada, who is being held in Algeria.

The French government's hands are, to a large extent, tied. But in the same way that certain Islamists in the Middle East tend to demonise the United States, holding it responsible for everything Israel does, so there are Algerian fundamentalists who regard France as a diabolical force that is to blame for everything the Algerian government does.

Even supposing that France wished to break off relations with Algeria, it would be unable to do so simply because of the sheer size of the Algerian community in France.

It is therefore legitimate for Paris to maintain its economic and political ties with Algiers. It would be extremely difficult for it to ignore a country that has a key role to play on the southern confines of Europe, and whose population is growing rapidly.

There is, however, less justification for maintaining the flow of financial aid — even if it is dwindling — that goes to Algeria with no political strings attached. Last year, Chirac came out in favour of the commendable principle of conditionality. The fact that he did so seems, curiously, to have slipped his mind.

Not a squeak of protest was heard from the French government when the referendum in November enabled the Algerian military regime to tighten its grip on the country. Every day the regime seems to shift further away from the political openness that people would like to see.

The European Union has just granted Algeria a loan of $170 million. Again, no political demands were attached to the granting of the loan.

While it is clearly desirable that the EU should have an "Algeria policy", Brussels cannot be blind to the nature of the regime in power in Algiers, which must take much of the blame for the present situation.

The EU is in a much better position to put pressure on Algiers. It has much greater freedom than Paris to speak its mind. If it fails to take advantage of that freedom, it may run the risk of being seen by the fundamentalists as being in cahoots with the Algerian military regime.

(December 26)

Turkey cosies up to Iran despite US ire

Nicole Pope in Ankara

WHEN the Iranian president, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, left the Turkish capital, Ankara, on December 22 at the end of a four-day official visit, he had every reason to feel satisfied.

With Iran blacklisted by many countries around the world, Rafsanjani does not get much chance to enjoy the pomp and circumstance of a full-blown official visit. On this occasion, he travelled not only with his wife, sons and daughters, but with a 250-strong delegation whose job was to build up ties between Ankara and Tehran.

Despite the tensions that regularly cloud relations between the two countries — Ankara accuses Tehran, among other things, of supporting the rebel Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) — they have much in common.

Ankara had already incurred the wrath of the United States last summer, when the Turkish prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan, paid a visit to Tehran and signed a contract worth more than $20 billion for the supply of Iranian gas over a 20-year period.

The US administration reacted to the Iranian president's visit by issuing Turkey with a strong warning "not to improve its relations with Iran". Rafsanjani responded by denouncing Washington's "flagrant arrogance".

Washington's warnings have not deterred the Turkish authorities from signing several draft agreements aimed at encouraging trade with Iran. Both Ankara and Tehran hope trade will more than double to around $2 billion a year. The agreements also provide for closer Turkish-Iranian co-operation in such areas as the environment and maritime transport.

Ankara has also renewed an agreement for the import of 4.5 million tonnes of Iranian oil. And in the course of bilateral talks, the possibility of building an oil pipeline was discussed.

In Turkey, the continuation of neighbourly relations with Iran is regarded not only as perfectly legitimate but in the country's best interest. President Suleyman Demirel himself took the trouble to go to the airport to greet Rafsanjani as he stepped off his plane.

There is, however, considerable debate in Turkey about just how far rapprochement with Iran should go. The Turkish prime minister has been doggedly pursuing his dream of bringing about a fraternal union of Islamic countries, even though the Iranian Shias and Turkish Sunnis have quite different conceptions of Islam.

Erbakan has been pushing hard for closer relations between the two countries, even going so far as to suggest co-operation in an area as sensitive as defence. Such a step would put Turkey in a very delicate position *vis-à-vis* Nato, of which it is a member.

However, it seems that neither Turkey's army nor its foreign ministry is prepared to venture along that particular road. The defence minister, Turhan Tayhan, who has taken a clear stand against any such move, prevented the Iranian delegation from visiting the Turkish factory where F-16 fighter planes are assembled.

Turkish newspapers seized the opportunity provided by Rafsanjani's visit to score points for Turkey's secular tradition, emphasising, for example, the contrast between the *chador*-wearing women in the Iranian delegation and their Turkish counterparts.

Although Rafsanjani's visit has not caused great concern in European capitals, it has once again highlighted the risks inherent in Turkey's foreign policy.

The country seems increasingly torn between the eastward-looking and Asian-orientated designs of the prime minister — who has consolidated his power by exploiting the embarrassment caused to his coalition partner, the True Path Party, by a recent corruption scandal (a car crash revealed the existence of collusion between a police chief, a drug trafficker on the run, and a deputy of Kurdish origin) — and Turkey' traditional tendency to look to the West, particularly the European Union, which the foreign minister, Tansu Ciller, does her best to represent.

(December 24)

Thai workers go on strike over bonuses

Jean-Claude Pomonti in Bangkok

TWO thousand members of Krung Thai Bank's 16,000-strong workforce went on strike on December 19 to press home their demand for an increase in their end-of-year bonus (last year it amounted to five and a half months' salary).

The previous day, staff at Siam Commercial Bank, Thai Farmers Bank, Bank of Ayudhya and Bangkok Bank had won bonuses amounting, respectively, to six months', 5.5 months', five months' and 4.7 months' earnings.

The bonuses were awarded in the wake of an incident on December 17, when a group of strikers, who police and bystanders say were drunk, set fire to the Bangkok offices of their Japanese employer, Sanyo.

The workers, who earn between $156 and $195 a month, had gone on strike the previous day after learning that their annual bonus was going to be slashed to the equivalent of three months' salary instead of around six months'. The incident resulted in six arrests and caused damage estimated at more than $2 million.

Thailand, which has one of the world's most dynamic economies, is by no means on the brink of anarchy. But it is experiencing a slight economic downturn. The economy will grow by "only" 6 per cent in 1996, compared with 8.5 per cent in 1995.

The export growth rate, which has greatly stimulated the economy, will be down to almost zero in 1996, as against 24 per cent in 1995. The trade deficit is set to increase by 30 per cent to $23 billion in 1997, against $17.5 billion in 1996. The current account deficit is more than 8 per cent of GDP. Inflation, officially put at 5.8 per cent, is higher than it has been for four years.

Analysts are looking forward to a regional recovery. The government says that by the end of the year the growth rate should be 7.5 per cent, with inflation down to 4.5 per cent.

But Thais are used to living beyond their means. For the past three years, Krung Thai Bank has offered its workforce bonuses of more than five months' salary. Whereas the average annual income per inhabitant is between $2,300 and $3,000 — a third less than in Malaysia, and two and a half times more than in Indonesia or the Philippines — Thais spent $2 billion on taking holidays abroad in 1996. Helping their children to study abroad cost them about the same amount.

Many salaried people take their whopping end-of-year bonuses into account when buying goods on credit. They find themselves up against the wall when employers pass the effects of flagging profits on to their bonuses, which make up for the shortcomings of Thailand's rudimentary social security system. The weakness of the trade unions is responsible for a sometimes disastrous lack of communication between labour and management.

As a result of rising living standards, the Thai economy has been evolving fast. Several years ago, faced with competition from countries such as China, Vietnam, Indonesia and Bangladesh, which can draw on a pool of cheap labour, Thailand began shifting the emphasis away from industries requiring a large unskilled workforce and towards industrial production with high added value. The textile industry, for example, which had the biggest export earnings up until the beginning of the nineties, has now fallen back to fourth or fifth position.

The Thais are unaccustomed to belt-tightening. The government that came to power in December is doing all it can to take the heat out of the situation. It hopes, above all, to restore a climate of confidence, which foreign investors had found to be sorely lacking under the previous administration.

(December 22-23)

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
January 5 1997

Cameras roll for the president

Agathe Logeart

WHEN President Jacques Chirac gave his long-awaited television interview on December 12, it was the first time for five months that he had appeared before the nation to discuss major policy issues.

The event was carefully orchestrated by his image makers: they chose the television channel, hand-picked the five interviewers, and devised the *mise-en-scène*.

This was no ordinary interview. It began with an echo of the evening in May 1995, when the victorious President Chirac, ensconced in his official car, was pursued through the streets on election night by a television reporter on a motorbike who stuck his microphone towards the open car window and asked repeatedly: "Happy then?" The only response he got from the president was a fixed smile.

It seems as if we have spent all our time since that novel piece of television reportage chasing after the president in the hope of eliciting answers to questions — answers that have never been given.

So Chirac's image makers decided to take us back to square one: in a long take that might have come straight out of a Claude Lelouch film, a camera carried on a motorbike raced through the streets of Paris (deserted this time) and turned into the courtyard of the Elysée Palace.

There were no red lights, no barriers, no police checks; and the door of the palace was open, suggesting that the president wanted to open his heart to the nation and at last deal with all those unanswered questions.

The programme was called: "The French ask themselves questions, the president replies." But the message that its over-the-top setting seemed to be putting across was this: "Enter without fear, you are at home here. All your questions are legitimate, all your questions are allowed. There are no taboos. No holds barred. I, the prophet and the oracle, will answer you."

A few dozen young people had been tastefully arranged around the room like house plants, to give an illusion of fresh air.

The focus then moved to the table where the president sat with the programme's compère, Guillaume Durand. The other journalists who had been invited to ask questions sat quietly, awaiting their turn a few feet away.

The president did not have an easy time of it: he was asked to respond to film clips that deftly illustrated topical issues and cruelly compared Chirac's campaign promises with his record as president. What did Chirac have to say? That France was too conservative, and that it would be more convenient to change the French than the way they lived; that something was going to be done about the judiciary, which was in poor shape as we all knew; that he was going to keep on his "courageous" prime minister, Alain Juppé, even if the French were sick and tired of him; and that there was no point in reshuffling the government as long as the majority voted the way they were asked to. More than two hours later, we had forgotten about the motorbike and our illusions — if we ever had any.

(December 14)

Chirac does a U-turn on the French

EDITORIAL

NEARLY two years ago, a leading French politician addressed the nation in the following rather unusual terms, which seemed to include an element of self-criticism: "We're told that the French, and not those who govern them, are primarily responsible for the recession, on the grounds that they resist change.

"People who say that kind of thing then go on to delight in listing the allegedly ineradicable mental blocks and mindsets that hinder the process of reform.

"In other words, it's the fault of the French that unemployment is taking us up a blind alley and that welfare spending, social security payments and public deficits are constantly increasing . . . I don't share that view."

Jacques Chirac — for it was he — even added, in that keynote speech of his 1995 presidential campaign: "Reform is not a bitter pill to be taken only under sedation, but a chance for the future — always supposing that we know how to take decisions, assume our responsibilities and do not spend too much time passing the buck to round-table discussions, representatives of labour and management, and committees of experts."

In his December 12, 1996, television interview, Chirac argued the exact opposite. If there was one theme that kept on recurring during his two-hour television performance, it was his insistent claim that France had seized up and that the French refused to budge.

"The country is profoundly conservative," he repeated. France is "a country which is not responsible", a country paralysed by trade unions who are prepared to "let rip" the moment anyone mentions reform.

At no point did Chirac the president have a word to say in favour of the political ideas that Chirac the candidate had advocated in 1995 as a remedy for the "fractured society".

On the contrary, he stubbornly sided with his unpopular government — though that did not stop him criticising its action on issues such as Corsica and the lorry drivers' strike. It was almost as if, having become president, he had decided to remain no more than a spectator of his own powerlessness.

The only two initiatives Chirac clearly explained and put his name to do not even seem to be the direct result of his action.

One was the setting up, for the umpteenth time, of a commission to look into the independence of the judiciary (which was largely a response to pressure from investigating magistrates). The other was the defence of a European policy based on a Franco-German partnership (which was initiated by his predecessor François Mitterrand).

Chirac would do well to reread his earlier statements from time to time. He would then understand the reasons for his government's unpopularity. His television performance only highlighted the yawning discrepancy between his decision to use the democratic medium of television and thus accept the risk of having to field awkward questions from ruthless interviewers, and his expression of the hardly democratic view that it is the French themselves who are chiefly responsible for their misfortunes.

One could almost detect in the president's attitude a temptation to make the people — who did not deserve such courageous leaders — simply disappear.

(December 14)



(Headline) Chirac: 'I'm keeping Juppé!' 'They *are* a conservative lot, the French!'

Juppé justifies his actions by the book

COMMENT

IT WOULD be churlish not to welcome an attempt by a politician like prime minister Alain Juppé to make himself better known to his compatriots. At first sight, there is something arresting and almost endearing in his brief essay, Entre Nous (Between Ourselves), which was published this week.

In his own words, he is "less unfeeling and thick-skinned than the chattering classes and the media would have one believe", and quite definitely "not a monster of indifference".

That is all very well. But it is far from certain that the perilous exercise of political power, especially in the case of a prime minister, really needs a helping hand from a literary genre that blithely throws together confessions and convictions, private feelings and public actions.

Entre Nous is not so much a book as a public relations exercise. Juppé, whose ratings in the opinion polls could hardly be lower, has decided to combat his unpopularity not by explaining his policies, but by revealing the man himself. He has used his pen to try to give himself a more human face.

Faced with the public's disenchantment with the collective action of his government, he paints the picture of a solitary man who is going through the purgatory of not being loved in order to redeem France, "that epitome of our faults and talents".

"Even when one is an *énarque* [graduate of the Ecole Nacionale de l'Administration, a college for high-flying civil servants], one is nevertheless a human being," Juppé remarks, without one being sure whether he is addressing the reader or Jacques Chirac, who during his 1995 presidential campaign could not have been more scathing about the *énarque* élite to which he himself belongs. One is tempted to suggest that the main qualification for being prime minister is to be a politician.

The ingredients of Juppé's book bear a curious resemblance to those used by Chirac in the two books he penned when he was at a low ebb in the opinion polls. The publication of Entre Nous clearly hopes to achieve the same result.

Chirac's body language enabled his two books, which were given considerable media exposure, to play a key role in the spectacular reversal of his political fortunes three months before the presidential election.

It is far from certain that the image of politics is enhanced by such public relations exercises. The French, on both the right and left, are fed up with promises not being kept. They would like to be able to go on believing in politics, which embodies their collective aspirations.

At a time when the people want explanations and action, the regime has successively served them up with an admission of powerlessness (Chirac's television interview) and a personal confession (Juppé's Entre Nous).

By injecting too great a personal element into the public arena, politicians make their action less respectable and thereby increase the credibility gap. The noxious endgame of François Mitterrand's second presidential term was similarly affected by the intrusion of private matters into the public domain: he was quick to use his cancer as a shield to hide behind whenever he was asked awkward questions about his past.

The emotions are an area which, by their every essence, do not allow for debate or challenge. They put an end to discussion before it has even started. The French may be touched by Juppé's confession, but it will not allow them to forget the hardships they face in their daily lives. Juppé insists that unemployment is the "cross" he has to bear. However honest the confession, a book will not change much.

(December 18)

Juppé on Juppé

On his alleged arrogance:

"I'm impatient by nature. I may sometimes be brusque, but not 'arrogant', as some accuse me of being — though I admit the two characteristics may be confused. I don't like it when people let things drag on or put off decisions. It will soon be the time of year when one makes good resolutions. I shall therefore do everything I can to be more accessible and more open to dialogue."

On his unpopularity:

"A year and a half ago I took up the post of prime minister with enormous enthusiasm, encouraged by public opinion, which saw me as the 'ideal' prime minister. Today I've broken all records for unpopularity. Have I failed? Have I changed so radically that those who praised me last year feel they should vilify me now? I don't think so. Does it leave me cold? Most definitely not. One thing is certain: I'm getting an awful lot of flak."

On his remark, when the industrial giant Thomson was coming up for privatisation, that the company was "worthless":

"I once said that Thomson had fewer assets than debts. Anyone would have drawn the conclusion that the market value of a company in that situation was low, to say the least. People inferred that I had offended the self-respect of the workers who had turned Thomson into one of our finest companies. So I removed the term 'symbolic franc' [token sum] from an official communiqué, because I found it shocking."

Extracts taken from Entre Nous

Le Monde

Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Jewish Zealotry Threatens Peace

OPINION
Richard Cohen

MAY I start with an anecdote? It's about the day I was in Hebron and Rabbi Moshe Levinger took me into the souk. He pushed through a mass of Palestinians, pointed to homes that once had been owned by Jews and vowed they would be owned by Jews again. I was scared. Levinger was brazen, astoundingly confident. All around us, literally pushing up against us, were Palestinians, any one of whom, virtually taunted by Levinger, could have slipped a knife between my ribs. Not long afterward, in fact, this is precisely what happened to a Jewish student.

I exhume that moment because recently I mentioned Levinger to an Israeli government official and he, to my astonishment, pronounced the rabbi a "great man." Levinger, this official said, was willing to die for his beliefs—the purported right, literally God-given, for Jews to be able to live anywhere on the West Bank they chose, Hebron included.

The history of Hebron is long and complicated and it is not all that easy to dismiss Jewish claims to the area. But the elevation of Levinger's swaggering zealotry to the level of greatness tells you something about the current Israeli government that is profoundly depressing. It is true that the prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, has made mistakes. Those can be easily corrected. But it is also true that the new government is infused with an ideological-religious conviction that is inimical to peace. That may be a lot harder to correct.

Better late than never, the Clinton administration is giving it the old college try. Last week it reprimanded Israel's Likud Party government for announcing it would expand Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Careful readers of the Israeli government statement will note that it referred to existing settlements, not new ones, and so stopped short of any outright breach of the Oslo agreements. But these expanded settlements are located in the very area where, someday, Palestinians hope to have a state of their own. The announcement was hardly what diplomats call a confidence builder.

The president's statement was a bit overdue and was probably delayed while he went about the business of re-election. After all, for some time now, the Netanyahu government has been casually poking the Palestinians in the eye, beginning with the opening of the Herodian Tunnel under the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City.

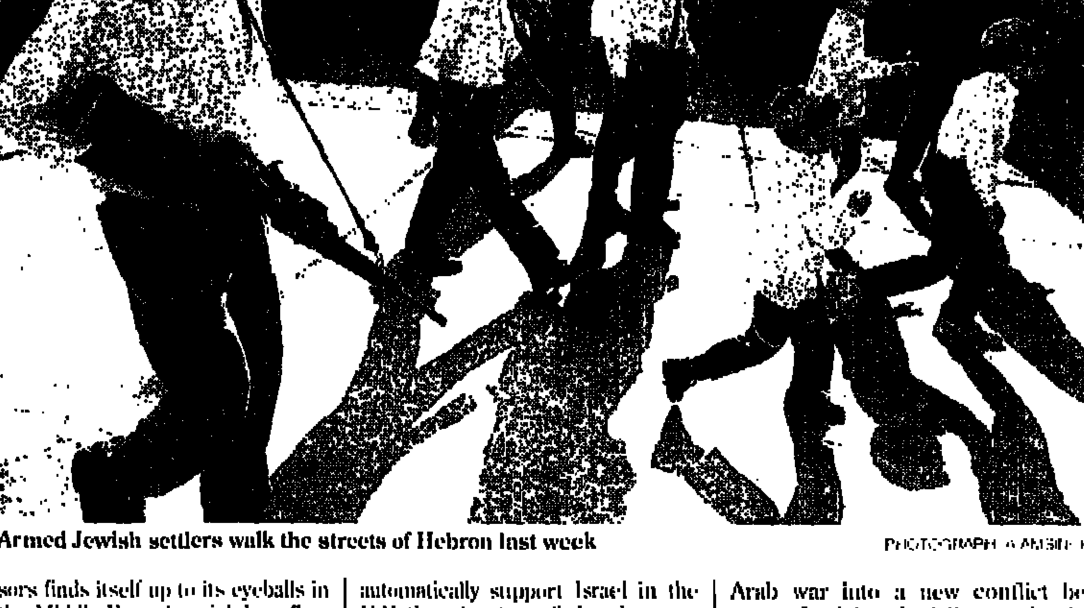
That act triggered rioting and gunfights between Palestinian policemen and Israeli soldiers. It also produced exclamations of surprise from Netanyahu who, master of public relations though he may be, is forever surprised at the Palestinian inability to see things his way. It must be the same with the settlements.

For the Clinton administration, which like all its recent predecessors finds itself up to its eyeballs in the Middle East, the trick is to fine-tune the pressure it clearly must put on the Israeli government. It must get results without confirming Likud's tendency to see opposition as proof that it is on the right course. For that reason, the administration cannot, as some have suggested, monkey with aid to Israel. No difference with a particular Israeli government must jeopardize the security of Israel itself.

On the other hand, Netanyahu has done just that. His truculence toward the Palestinians has set back the peace process. He may, in fact, have shredded it. That relieves the United States of any obligation to automatically support Israel in the U.N. Security Council. Let the resolutions come. They really don't hurt as much as they sting and the Likud government could benefit from the realization that it is steadily isolating itself. It has few real friends left.

It's hard in Washington to find anyone who is optimistic about the peace process. Things have truly gone to ruin. The steady march of progress — the abandonment of the Arab boycott, diplomatic recognition of Israel by Morocco, Tunisia and the Gulf states, and a cordial peace with Jordan — all these achievements have been endangered, if not reversed. Netanyahu has transformed the old Jewish-Arab war into a new conflict between Jewish colonialists and colonized Palestinians. Nowhere in the world has such a battle been won in the 20th century. Israel, a country founded on history, cannot ignore its lessons.

Ultimately, Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat will probably reach agreement on Hebron. But the critical issue is not the political status of that town and its small band of settlers, but whether the settler mentality, as exemplified by Levinger, is going to be exalted or recognized for what it is—reckless and dangerous zealotry. If the United States is truly Israel's friend, it's time for some tough love.



Armed Jewish settlers walk the streets of Hebron last week PHOTOGRAPH: A AMSILE

Second Language for a Second-Class Life

COMMENT
Ellen Goodman

WHAT WOULD Henry Higgins make of this? What if he went to teach a flower girl the King's English only to discover that her local school board had declared Cockney another language?

In Oakland, California, they are involved in a modern remake of the Pygmalion story. A school board faced with the failure of too many African American students has now decreed slang a valid and different language. Using the dense vocabulary of Academese, the board members also called for classes to be taught partially in Ebonics "for the combined purposes of maintaining the legitimacy and richness of such language and to facilitate their acquisition and mastery of English language skills."

By fiat, they have transformed black street talk into Ebonics and put Ebonics — offspring of "ebony" and "phonics" first conceived in academic circles — on a par with French or Chinese. They have made "I be" the linguistic equivalent of "je suis."

What do you say to a school board so desperate it has have declared its students foreigners in their own country? Is it defeatism that says the poorest black children in inner cities live in another country, where they literally don't speak the same language? What do you say to a community of parents and teachers so torn between the desire for respect and the desire for learning, that they, too, become "bilingual"?

The irony is that too many Americans are tongue-tied, speaking only one language in a diverse world. But Ebonics is a second language for a second-class life. It's a "language" defined by people who did not get their Ph.D.s or their jobs speaking it.

Even proud Liza Doolittle was realistic enough to know she needed a verbal passport to a better life. When she came to Higgins for "English" lessons, it wasn't to become a Fair Lady but to work in a flower shop. She said, "They won't take me unless I can talk more genteel."

Like any American descended from immigrants, I know about language and culture. In the era when my father, the first American-born child in his family, started school, many teachers were "unencumbered" by sensitivity training. A sometimes stated goal of public schools in my city and others was to "Americanize" children from families overtly described as illiterate and superstitious, the "refuse of their teeming shores."

My father talked of college friends who were ashamed to speak German or Italian at home, ashamed of their immigrant parents and ashamed of their shame. There was a lot of heat applied to the melting pot that we look back upon with such nostalgia. But there was also a commitment, however ruthless, to integration, to preparing children to enter the new world. The community was invested in their collective future.

I do not think you have to destroy a child's self-respect or respect for parents in order to make her life better than theirs. It's not hard to understand one motive of board member Toni Cook, to "quit saying there's something wrong with a majority of the children." Instead of calling it bad English, call it Ebonics. But it will not do to shuck children or each other. These children who watch TV in their homes do not need a simultaneous interpreter. Black English is not the language of Maya Angelou or Jesse Jackson. Ebonics is not the African English spoken by South Africa's Archbishop Tutu or U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

In school districts already stunningly segregated by race, Ebonics is now touted as a tool for teaching what is called Standard English. But to validate slang as the "real black talk" undermines the English lesson. It teaches that the poorest inner-city culture is the "real" black homeland.

In America alone, there are distinct dialects and speech patterns that go far beyond the inner cities, ranging from the hollers of Appalachia to the down east reaches of Maine. But if you only speak your mother's tongue, you may only lead your mother's life. Any child who wants to travel to a wider world needs to talk his way out.

France Ends Kurdish Mission

Charles Trueheart in Paris

THE FRENCH government said last week it would withdraw at the end of December from the five-year-old allied air operation designed to protect Kurdish civilians in northern Iraq.

French officials explaining the abrupt decision cited a change in the nature of the original mission known as Operation Provide Comfort, launched by the United States, Britain, Turkey and France after an unsuccessful Kurdish rebellion against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein at the end of the 1991 Gulf War. The mission is run out of Incirlik Air Base in southern Turkey.

The humanitarian aim of the operation "does not figure" in the narrower successor mission that began on January 1 after a vote to extend its mandate in somewhat altered form by the Turkish parliament, the French Foreign Ministry said in a communique, and "for those reasons, France won't participate."

Spokeswoman Anita Limido said the main goal of the operation had been to ensure the safety of humanitarian flights by private aid groups into northern Iraq. This would no longer be necessary because a United Nations food-for-oil pact required that 30 percent of all aid destined for Iraq be earmarked for Kurdish areas, Limido said, adding that the new mission "is essentially one of air surveillance." The decision does not affect France's military participation in the other "no-fly" zone, over southern Iraq, monitored by U.S., Saudi, British and French aircraft.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Christopher Bush called France a "valued participant" in Operation Provide Comfort and the mission in southern Iraq. "Certainly we would have preferred" that France remain part of Operation Provide Comfort, he said, "but it's obviously a French decision." He added that coalition air operations "will not be disrupted" by the French decision.

Spokesman John Dinger said it was "hard to imagine that France did this in any broader context of relations with the United States. I think they did it based on this issue of what they felt to be in their interests." He added that France had told the United States it would continue to press for Iraq's full compliance with U.N. Security Council resolutions that ended the Gulf War.

The decision to leave the U.S.-led mission in northern Iraq came on the heels of a series of actions and gestures pointing to a chill in relations between the French and U.S. governments.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Anger as China Appoints HK Council

Keith B. Richburg in Hong Kong

COMMUNIST rulers last week named 60 pro-Beijing stalwarts to a new interim legislature for Hong Kong, ignoring international cries of outrage, threats of court action and egg-throwing protesters. It will replace the democratically elected body China has pledged to scrap when it takes control later this year.

The naming of the provisional legislature had long been expected. But China's decision to go ahead with the move in the face of strong condemnation from Britain, the departing colonial power, and the United States is the clearest sign yet that Beijing aims to impose its stamp on Hong Kong despite international criticism, and at the risk of unnerving residents and disrupting the territory's political and economic stability.

The legislature was chosen in balloting by a 400-member selection committee appointed by China, which met in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen. It is expected to rewrite anti-subversion laws for Hong Kong that the outgoing British government had modified; toughen laws on freedom of information; and act as a kind of shadow government, meeting on Chinese soil and drafting bills that will take effect here after China formally assumes sovereignty on July 1, 1997.

The 60 members of the interim body were chosen from a group of 130 pro-China politicians and businessmen in Hong Kong who put themselves forward as candidates. Hong Kong radio reported that 33 members of the current legislature, which was elected in September 1995, will be in the provisional one. Twenty-six incumbents did not run, and one was defeated.

Ten of the winners — including Elsie Tu, Peggy Lam, Cheng Kai-nam, Tam Yiu-chung and Tsang Yok-sing — were losers in the 1995 election, the first time the Hong Kong legislature was fully elected. Candidates from pro-China parties did well, with the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong and the Liberal Party winning nine and 10 seats, respectively. The Progressive Alliance won five.

The largest and most popular party in Hong Kong, the Democrats, refused to participate in a process it labeled a sham. It also condemned sitting legislators who agreed to participate in the new body, saying it would lead to conflicting loyalties.

Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen struck a defiant tone as he opened the session in Shenzhen. In a hall bedecked with red curtains and Communist Party trappings, Qian told the assembled pro-Beijing loyalists that "what is regrettable is that Britain has lacked the courage to face reality."

Qian also said Britain's condemnation showed only that the outgoing colonial power is now helpless.

China's actions, and Qian's remarks prompted an unusually sharp exchange between senior British and Chinese diplomats, and a particularly scathing attack from Chris Patten, the colony's British governor, who called the procedures in Shenzhen "stomach-churning" and "a bizarre farce."

"What Mr. Qian should be asking is whether people in Hong Kong feel helpless, if they have this sort of institution produced by this farcical procedure foisted upon them," Patten said, adding that Hong Kong residents could take comfort that "the whole world is watching what's happening over the border."

Patten also echoed remarks made last week by British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind, who said China should agree to have the International Court of Justice in The Hague arbitrate the dispute and decide whether the establishment of an interim legislature is, as Britain believes, a violation of the 1984 treaty that lays out terms for the return of Hong Kong to China.

The United States joined the condemnation of China, with State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns calling Beijing's actions "unjustified and unnecessary."

Democracy activists and elected Hong Kong lawmakers who will lose their jobs when the interim legislature takes office in July also denounced China's move. Some protested outside the New China News Agency, Beijing's unofficial embassy here, while others hurled eggs at the buses taking the Beijing loyalists to the selection process. Activists were barred from crossing into China, so a small group set loose helium balloons with a banner saying, "Oppose the Provisional Legislature."



Pro-democracy marchers protesting against China's proposed Legislative Council in Hong Kong

City Works Its Way Up In the World

James Rupert in Abidjan

IN THIS humid port city, popular complaints about life these days focus on the extent to which either things or people work. For thousands of wealthy expatriates, too little does. For millions of poorer Africans, too few do.

Still, more than any other city in West Africa, Abidjan, in Ivory Coast, works. The evidence is that foreigners keep coming — enough to make Abidjan the region's most cosmopolitan city.

Tens of thousands of Europeans, Asians and Americans are in Abidjan to do business. The demand for luxury villas in the suburbs where these foreigners live has risen by as much as 50 percent in the past two years, real estate agents say. And hundreds of thousands of Africans — mostly from Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea and Niger — have come to seek work as manual laborers, servants or petty traders. Their demand for housing, in poor neighborhoods or outlying shantytowns, has risen as well. There's a foreign middle class, too. As in many West African cities, most small shops seem to be owned and managed by Lebanese, and there are Indian and Vietnamese businesses, as well.

In Abidjan, the foreigners say, making a profit or even a living wage is difficult — but still easier than elsewhere in West Africa.

"To do business here, you have to operate differently than in America," said Mike Phillips, a transplanted Californian who heads operations here for Comstar, a U.S.-owned cellular phone company. Comstar's ninth-floor suite of offices was sufficiently comfortable — this means airconditioned — that Phillips and his colleagues easily bustled about wearing ties.

"It takes three months to get a residency card and six months to get a car license plate," Phillips said. Still, "you can do it . . . It's a lot worse in most of central and West Africa."

Far below Phillips's office, immigrant Africans say much the same of Abidjan. Muhammad Traore, a single Guinean in his twenties, piloted a taxi through the jammed streets. The car's windows were open to admit every lukewarm puff of air. At each stoplight, knots of young men leaned in, hawking an impressive array of watches, calculators, clothes and the occasional telephone answering machine.

"A lot of them come from Nigeria, for the same reason I came from Guinea," Traore said. And for the same reason that an estimated 2 million or more immigrant Africans live in Ivory Coast. "We just want to make money, to have a life and get married. Life here is not easy, but it's better than at home."

Traore added hopefully: "Myself, I am just staying here while I try to find a way to get to America. Do you know how I can get an invitation letter from there for a visa?"

Cali Drug Lords Ran Empire Behind Bars

Douglas Farah in Bogota

WHEN police raided the maximum-security prison here last month, they found more than they had bargained for.

Not only had imprisoned leaders of the Cali cocaine cartel been arranging to have legislators bribed, as had been widely alleged for some weeks, but the drug lords possessed detailed information on how to fly illegal drugs into the United States and instructions on circumventing the Colombian judicial system, police said.

The raid on La Picota Prison was authorized after police intercepted phone calls from the prison by brothers Miguel and Gilberto Rodriguez Orejuela and another convicted drug trafficker, Ivan Urdinola, to their lawyers. It laid bare the extent to which the Cali cartel continues to run its business from jail, despite government claims to the contrary.

"The problem," said police commander Gen. Rosso Serrano, "is the tremendous corruption at all levels of the prison system." Justice Minister Carlos Medellin has said there will be an investigation at the prison.

The United States has voiced growing concern about the continuing operations of imprisoned cartel leaders and raised the issue with Foreign Minister Maria Emma Mejia during her recent visit to Washington.

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said that Washington would monitor the situation closely as it decides whether to certify Colombia this year as cooperating in the international fight against the illegal drug trade. Last year, the Clinton administration did not certify Colombia because of evidence that President Ernesto Samper's 1994 presidential campaign accepted $6 million from the Cali cartel. Samper denies the allegations.

Most of the leaders of the cartel were arrested or surrendered to police in 1995 and have confessed to minor drug-trafficking charges in exchange for sentences that, in effect, will keep them in prison for less than 10 years. All are being held in the same wing of La Picota Prison, which police say allows them to not only live in comfort but also devise strategies for distributing drugs and bribing officials.

It is not difficult for the cartel leaders, who have amassed billions of dollars, to tempt prison guards who earn less than $400 a month. A recent study released by Cromos magazine estimated the combined fortune of the Rodriguez Orejuela brothers at $205 billion, including income from legitimate businesses they established with drug money.

"They clearly feel they are safer and can operate more comfortably from a prison they control than they could as fugitives," an intelligence officer said. "They have a sophisticated communications network they run through a pay phone at the prison and carry on business."

After the tapped telephone conversations revealed that the traffickers were arranging to bribe key congressmen, former vice president Humberto de la Calle Lombana called for immediate, drastic action. "There is a government that is governing more than the government, and it is not at the presidential palace," said de la Calle, who resigned as vice president earlier this year. "It is in La Picota."

But Col. Rafael Pardo, the official responsible for prison security, said: "One cannot say they are committing crimes from prison; what we discovered is that they were violating a few prison regulations."

It is because of that attitude, police and diplomats said, that Colombia has suffered several international embarrassments over its prisons. In 1991, Medellin cartel leader Pablo Escobar surrendered after negotiating a deal that allowed him to build his own luxury prison and select the guards. He left that prison a year later through a secret tunnel when police threatened to move him to a real penal facility.

Earlier this year, Jose Santaçruz Londono, a Cali cartel leader, walked out of La Picota with the help of a lawyer. Rival drug traffickers later gunned him down.

According to police at La Picota where seven of the Cali cartel's leaders are being held with their main bodyguards, virtually unlimited access is permitted to traffickers' families and lawyers. In one week in November, the Rodriguez brothers received 123 lawyers' visits. Police discovered mail was leaving the prison unopened by officials and that cellular telephones were allowed into the prison almost openly.

But the most surprising result of the police raid were a collection of files found in the cell of Jhon Jairo Ponce, who works for the Rodriguez brothers. The files contained a flight manual titled "To Successfully Carry Out an Illegal Flight, Analyze the Following Aspects." Another was called "How to Give Testimony and Receive Judicial Benefits," which advised on which crimes to confess to and other hints on receiving the lightest possible sentence.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Cultural Collision

Michael Elliott

The Clash Of Civilisations And The Remaking Of World Order
By Samuel P. Huntington
Simon & Schuster. 367pp. $26

IN 1993, Samuel P. Huntington, director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard, published an article in Foreign Affairs on a coming "clash of civilizations" that will dominate the future of global politics. His new book, eagerly awaited by many who read the article — whether or not they agreed with its thesis — expands on the original idea. The book is studded with insights, flashes of rare brilliance, great learning and, in particular, an ability to see the familiar in a new and provocative way.

Yet, in the end, it doesn't convince. One might venture to think that there will be few books published this year which are, at one and the same time, so stimulating and yet so maddening.

Huntington states his argument plainly. "World politics," he writes, "is being reconfigured along cultural and civilizational lines. In this world the most pervasive, important and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities." Instinctively one knows what he means. It was Panglossian to think that the end of the Cold War — that peculiar, because ideologically charged, worldwide contest — would usher in a time free of conflict.

It is not hard to believe, as Huntington seems to believe, that the wars in ex-Yugoslavia or the Caucasus or Kashmir have their roots in culture or that they could all become bigger. Nor is it difficult to identify at least some of the major contemporary civilizations or their wellsprings, such as religion. Huntington's taxonomy encompasses seven main civilizations: Sinic (in effect, Greater Chinese); Japanese; Hindu; Islamic; Western; Latin-American (which has, supposedly, evolved in its own way from shared roots in the Western model); and "possibly" African. With the exception of some provocative comments on Mexico, the book hardly discusses the Latin-American case, and the African one even less so. In very large measure Huntington is concerned with the way in which Islamic, Western and Asian cultures may be expected to interrelate with one another.

Huntington is surely right to argue that the world cannot be seen solely through Western eyes and to suggest that the "triumph of the West" is neither complete nor uncontroversial. On the contrary, it is very often resented both in the Islamic nations and in Asian ones. The world, Huntington says, is not becoming homogeneous; English is not a lingua franca nor likely to be one any time soon; the sort of capitalism preached in the halls of the IMF and World Bank in Washington, or celebrated each winter at the World Economic Forum in Davos, is not sweeping all before it. All this is a useful corrective to one-world dreaminess. As it happens, I read this book during a 12-day trip around the world, on Western-built planes, owned by Western companies, staying in hotels which were full of Western beds, Western drinks, Western newspapers and TV channels. And yet people in Hong Kong told me that the accurate use of English was in decline there, while any bounce between Southeast Asia and midwestern Europe is enough to convince even the unobservant that, of the two, the area that's booming economically isn't the "Western" one.

So far so good. And yet the book begs so many questions that its central tenet must be in doubt. Here are three of them. First, are civilizations as cohesive as Huntington seems to think? On my little trip I visited Singapore and Bangkok. Both Asian, both cities in "miracle" economies, a short hop from each other; but in their social arrangements, their culture, their attitude (say) to sex, they are on different planets. More pertinent, why does Huntington think, without ever examining the proposition, that western Europe and the United States have civilizational ties so strong that they will never be rivals? Does he not know how resentful many Western Europeans now are about American political and cultural hegemony?

SECOND, if culture is such a strong determinant of social behavior, why is Huntington so dead set against multiculturalism? If efforts to impose one culture on another invite strife, as Huntington contends, why should such efforts have harmonious results if attempted within a single nation? In fact, he almost certainly overstates the degree of cultural Balkanization in the United States. In a passage without footnotes (this in an impressively documented book) he asserts that there is "some evidence" that "resistance to assimilation is stronger among Mexican migrants" than it was with other immigrants to the United States. There is plenty of non-anecdotal evidence the other way.

Third: Accept, for the sake of argument, that civilizations can cohere and can be rivals. Is it not still possible for countries to have allies across the civilizational divide? "In the coming era," says Huntington, "the avoidance of major civilizational wars requires core states to refrain from intervening in conflicts in other civilizations." Taken literally, that means that the Gulf War of 1990-91 was a terrible mistake. But for the United States to have abstained from the war would have meant that it was prepared to leave an ally — Saudi Arabia — to its fate. Apart from a neat lesson in civilizational politics, what would have been gained?

Actually, I doubt if Huntington would press his argument as far as he implies, because, in what is almost a coda to the book, he casts doubt on his whole thesis. All civilizations, he argues, are threatened by barbarism — drug smugglers, international criminals, you name it. So challenged, the "great civilizations" must "hang together or hang separately." Bit of a stretch, that, at the end of a book which has sought to convince the reader that those civilizations are bound soon to clash. So enjoy this book for all the wonderful stuff in it: Treat its Big Idea with the skepticism with which, at the end, its creator invests his own progeny.



ILLUSTRATION: JEAN-FRANCOIS ALLAUX

Once Upon a Time in the West

T.H. Watkins

Bad Land: An American Romance
By Jonathan Raban
Pantheon. 324pp. $25

I KNOW it is not cool, and I am probably too much of an enthusiast for my own good, but every now and then I encounter a book that makes me want to grab friends by the lapels and insist that they stop everything they are doing, sit down and read it. Then report back to me. And if they don't like the book, their reaction is likely to color my judgment of them forevermore. Idiots.

So it is with Jonathan Raban's Bad Land: An American Romance. Raban, British born and bred but now living happily, if wetly, in Seattle, has taken on one of the quintessential American stories — the settlement of the Great Plains — and made it his own. He is a writer of extraordinary gifts, and no one since Wallace Stegner in Wolf Willow has evoked with greater power the marriage of land and sky that gives the United States both its beauty and its terror. His journalist's eye is sharp and his reportage is exemplary.

As a historian, Raban is uncluttered by academic claptrap and preconception, and no one since Walter Prescott Webb in The Great Plains has understood just how precisely the romance-ridden attempt to settle the nearly treeless, semi-arid country of the High Plains called into question our national sanity. East of the Mississippi, Webb wrote, "civilization stood on three legs — land, water, and timber; west of the Mississippi not one but two of these legs were withdrawn — water and timber — and civilization was left on one leg — land. It is small wonder that it toppled over in temporary failure." Just so, Raban might respond. But what do you mean, "temporary"?

Raban takes as his core sample an enormous rectangle that includes part of western North Dakota and South Dakota and much of eastern Montana. While his narrative dips into the 19th century from time to time and slides even more frequently in and out of the present (the Unabomber comes under discussion at one point, for instance, and legitimately so), most of the book centers on the fate of those families — many of European origin — who were seduced into the region by the promise of "free" government land after passage of the Enlarged Homestead Act in 1909. At the same time, the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad — the Milwaukee Road — was anxious to sell its own government-grant lands, as well as enhance its role as one of the essential links in the great symbiosis between the hinterland, with its products, and the great eastern cities, with their markets. Thus, the railroad amplified the government's tempting offer with the crooning of its own relentless (and too often relentlessly fictive) advertisements. A self-styled "scientific" agronomist meanwhile, promised that a sure-fire method of "dry land" farming would swiftly overcome the inconvenience of an annual rainfall that rarely topped 14 inches.

And so they came, these hapless pilgrims, their heads stuffed with visions of a new Arcadia, many spilling off the cars with Old World clothing and uncertain English, even less prepared than their American-born counterparts to take on the challenge of a land that not only did not welcome them but would do everything in its power to throw them off. For the most part, the land succeeded, answering their hopes with droughts and dust storms, grasshopper invasions, tornadoes, hailstorms, bone-freezing winters, and the ghastly psychological burden of loneliness, while the vagaries of the market imprisoned them in a never-ending boom-and-bust cycle that drove thousands to bankruptcy, some to madness, and most of those few who remained into a dependence upon federal subsidies that has bred a perverse and sometimes furious resentment against the federal government that is no less profound for being entirely illogical.

A familiar tale, of course, and one that continues, as farms and ranches go under, and survivors cast baleful eyes on environmentalists and others who would tell them how to live what is left of their lives. What makes it new is Raban's determination to give it shape as an irrepressibly human story. He knows the history, and he uses it well. He knows the land, and he describes it magnificently. But he knows people even better, and whether he is telling us of the long-dead Ned Wallaston, struggling to keep himself and his family on the home place along Whitney Creek, or of the present-day citizens of Ismay, who change the town's name to Joe, Montana, in a pitiable effort to resuscitate their dying hamlet, Raban's genius gives those who might have been no more than characters in a cautionary tale the triumphant credibility of real human beings — some betrayed by their own greed, others done in by circumstances they could not control, but all forced to deal with the consequences of one more American dream gone terribly wrong.

Paperbacks

Non-Fiction

Movieland: Hollywood and the Great American Dream Culture, by Jerome Charyn (New York University Press, $17.95)

IN THE vein of Otto Friedrich's City Of Nets (though originally published some years earlier), this is a movie-lovers testimony. Charyn once worked for director Otto Preminger and interviewed several old movie people as part of his research: The most memorable may be Mae Clarke, never quite a star but the recipient of perhaps the most famous blow in movie history when Jimmy Cagney smashed her in the face with a grapefruit in Public Enemy. Charyn's discussion of Bonnie And Clyde explains how seminal a film it was in late 1960's America: It was "a film that had a European flavour, but wore American pants. Bonnie and Clyde was the beginning of our own New Wave."

A John Graves Reader (University of Texas Press, $15.95)

BORN in 1920 in Forth Worth, Texas, John Graves has stuck, as a writer, close to home. "I wrote what presented itself to be written," he says in the preface to this collection. What presented itself was the life and landscape of Texas and the Southwest, which he has explored and memorialized in books such as Goodbye To A River (1960), Hard Scrabble (1974) and From A Limestone Ledge (1980). Graves' sensibility lies somewhere between Thoreau and Larry McMurtry. In an excerpt from Goodbye To A River, the writer sits by a campfire, drinking "syrupy coffee," smoking his pipe, and ruminating: "You run the risk of thinking yourself an ascetic when you enjoy with that intensity the austere facts of fire and coffee and tobacco and the sound and feel of country places. You aren't, though. In a way you're more of a sensualist than a fat man washing down *sauerbraten* and dumplings with heavy beer while a German band plays and a plump blonde kneads his thigh. You have shucked off the gross delights, and those you have left are few, sharp, and strong."

The Story Of My Life, by Clarence Darrow (Da Capo, $16.95)

MOST people know Clarence Darrow (1857-1938) as the man who defended Darwinism against creationism in the famous "monkey trial" of 1925, Tennessee v. Scopes. It's fitting that Alan Dershowitz contributes a new introduction to this reprint of the original 1932 edition; Darrow was the Dershowitz or Johnnie Cochran of his day, taking on the most sensational cases. He represented Leopold and Loeb during their "thrill" murder trial in 1924, saving his clients from the gallows using a temporary insanity defense. Dershowitz's introduction raises some intriguing doubts about how well Darrow really argued in the Scopes trial, and holds that Darrow's opponent, William Jennings Bryant, was not the narrow-minded creationist he's made out to be. "Darrow's eloquent plea for life has had a significant impact on the continuing debate about capital punishment. Most death penalty lawyers I know have read his masterful closing argument and many use parts of it in their pleas for life."

Lights switched off on mean street

The harsh repercussions of US energy deregulation could be repeated in the UK, writes **Chris Barrie**

THERE are streets in American cities where electricity and gas supplies are a thing of the past. At night apartment windows are mostly in darkness, although a few flicker and glow in the light of kerosene lamps. Food, if heated at all, is cooked on potentially hazardous portable stoves. And the occupants wear coats, even when they are in bed.

Welcome to the world of energy deregulation, where the land of the free demands that all households pay the price for the energy they use. Black ghettos in 1996 had more to do with lack of heat and light than skin colour, although poverty remained their defining feature.

Impossible in Britain? Not at all, say academics and consumer groups who specialise in the energy business. In fact, it is happening already. And in 18 months' time, when the electricity and gas markets are thrown open to competition, the poor in Britain could find themselves even worse off while the affluent bask in the glow of lower electricity and gas prices.

In 1995 local authorities in south Wales commissioned a study into low-income households and their problems securing adequate energy for their homes. It threw new light on the impact of privatisation and showed how many households are worse off in a world governed by market forces and competition.

The survey found that more than half of households using prepayment meters had "self-disconnected" their supply of gas or electricity, which had been cut off because they had problems buying or finding the tokens to feed the meter. For many, this so-called voluntary interruption of their power or heating supply lasts a weekend or longer.

The survey also shows that families with very small children form the majority of those unable to manage their token-meters without being disconnected. It says: "In other words, the greater difficulties produced by the system are concentrated upon the most vulnerable households."

Two groups, it says, are most at risk — those households containing someone unable to work because of health difficulties and those families with a child aged under five in the household.

Their struggle is cumulative. Low-income, single-parent families already find the economics of daily life difficult. Throw in the need to budget for a stockpile of prepayment tokens and weekends in the cold and without hot food inevitably follow.

Nor do these families have only one meter into which they must feed a share of scarce resources. Those paying for their electricity this way will almost certainly be paying for their gas by prepayment meter, too.

The official line is to use statistics to sweep this problem under the carpet. Ministers preach the benefits of privatisation. The gas and electricity industries point to official disconnection figures which purport to show that disconnections are falling and should no longer be considered a serious problem.



Dark days . . . How long until Britain's ghettos are as energy poor as Philadelphia's? PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER PILLITZ

British Gas has, for example, cut the number of compulsory disconnections dramatically, from 61,700 customers in 1987/88 to 1995's tally of 14,500 households. Similarly, disconnections ordered by the regional electricity companies, privatised in 1990, have fallen.

The gas and electricity industries indulge in regular self-congratulatory back-slapping over this achievement. But in reality the disconnection scoresheet may be as bad as ever — or worse.

The problem is that no one knows, because the households in question are deemed to have disconnected themselves voluntarily by failing to feed their voracious meters. Industry regulators, however, seem content to accept this position at face value — that consumers apparently benefit from prepayment meters because there is no possibility of falling into debt.

But for the Government and the power companies there are other, less publicised, benefits to this system. Self-disconnection is hidden because it does not require official action. The companies benefit by charging up-front these customers, the poorest, for their vital energy supplies and escape the costs of having to chase these people for payment. No other customer is treated this way.

The Government's desire for favourable statistics on energy poverty neatly squares with the industries' goal of minimising costs of coping with social problems.

So it is not surprising that gas and electricity companies are keen to install prepayment meters. Five years ago, there were 1.9 million electricity prepayment meters in British homes. In 1995 that number had jumped to more than 3.2 million, and for 1996 it is expected to be close to 4 million. British Gas has also increased its prepayment meters, with more than 850,000 now in place.

By definition these meters are installed in the homes of people who already have difficulty paying their bills. Yet these people are also expected to pay a higher standing charge for their gas and electricity than other, more affluent, customers.

In an attitude that is both rigorously logical and absurd, the gas and electricity industry watchdogs — Clare Spottiswoode and Professor Stephen Littlechild respectively — allow companies to levy higher charges for supplying the poor because past debts have to be recovered and the costs of installing and administering these prepayment meters is, firms argue, higher than running direct debit customers' accounts.

In electricity this surcharge is levied through a higher standing charge. With gas, consumers pay a higher tariff.

The result is a gulf in energy costs between rich and poor. According to the Electricity Association, the average customer on direct debit pays $445 a year. Electricity paid by quarterly bill costs $453, while prepayment meters cost $479.

Prof Littlechild, director-general of Offer, may side with the electricity industry on these charges but his own regional representatives do not. The consumer committees have been lobbying him to call a halt to this surcharge on the poor.

The issue is whether a market structure can be devised that is humane as well as competitive. The omens are bleak

Yvonne Constance, who heads the regional committee chairmen, says high charges mean the poor are proving very profitable to regional electricity companies. Ms Constance and her colleagues, hardly anti-establishment figures, believe that the industry is overstating the cost of installing and running pre-payment meters.

The plight of the poor now is beginning to cause serious concern among consumer groups, who fear that the discrepancy between prepayment and direct-debit customers — poor and affluent — will widen even further from 1998, when the domestic gas and electricity markets are opened to competition.

In an analysis for the Institute for Public Policy Research of the economics of the electricity market, Professor Catherine Waddams Price warns that low-income households will face higher charges as competition is introduced and companies are forced to unwind hidden subsidies.

As companies vie for the "best" customers — the good payers — so the costs of supplying the rest have to be spread across a dwindling group. Prof Waddams Price says: "Competition could bring real hardship to some vulnerable households and make it increasingly difficult for them to clear their debts and move into a lower cost payment category."

Research by Andres Gomez-Lobo, of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, suggests gas customers who consume relatively little gas may also suffer unless competition dramatically drives down costs. These consumers will not benefit unless the costs of supplying customers fall by between 20 and 30 per cent — a tall order.

Unfortunately the proposed rules for 1998 will do little to right the imbalance against poorer households. Ms Constance says there will be little incentive for electricity companies to cut the costs of supplying them.

Worse, an electricity company competing in the home region of a rival will need to use a prepayment meter installed by that rival if it is to sell power into the house. Because it owns that meter, the home company will have the right to be consulted by its rival on one of only two tariffs to be used.

Ms Constance predicts that this will stifle any desire among companies to seek out poorer households and offer them lower charges: "If you cannot offer your own tariff and must talk to rival companies, why bother at all?"

Why bother? The words apply to swaths of America's inner cities. The issue facing British policymakers in 1997 is whether they can devise a market structure that is humane as well as competitive, compassionate as well as discriminating. The omens so far are wholly bleak.

In Brief

THE GAP between the pay of leading UK company directors and their workers has grown by 4 per cent over the past year, according to a Trades Union Congress report that shows the Greenbury Committee's reforms to curtail excessive executive pay have failed.

BRITISH AIRWAYS' disastrous alliance with USAir came to an end as the carrier announced plans to sell its stake in the American airline.

UP TO 90,000 investors in unit trusts operated by former Morgan Grenfell fund manager Peter Young stand to receive about $332 million in the biggest compensation programme ordered by London City regulators.

EUROPEAN countries intent on slashing budget deficits to qualify for monetary union in 1999 run the risk of of damaging their short-term growth prospects, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development warned, saying the process should be gradual and credible.

THE Liverpool dockers sacked 15 months ago threatened the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company with an international boycott after overwhelmingly rejecting their former employer's final peace offer

BRITAIN'S Post Office showed a jump in profits from $282 million to $380 million for the first six months of 1996 — but needs to make $1.6 million every working day to "meet the Government's demanding cash and efficiency targets".

ONLY two of the original 12 privatised British regional electricity companies (RECs), Southern and Yorkshire, remain independent, after Northern Electric fell into the hands of US predator, CE Electric, for $1.3 billion. It is the fourth REC firm to be taken over by a US firm.

MARVEL Entertainment Group, the comics publisher, filed for bankruptcy protection as a manoeuvre to keep the company out of the hands of corporate raider Carl Icahn.

GROWTH in the US record industry has slowed to an anaemic 2 per cent over the past two years and analysts are warning that the industry is on the verge of a major shake-up.

THE fashion for greater corporate focus, with many conglomerates disposing of non-core activities, led to a number of management buy-outs in 1996. The value of MBOs in the UK climbed from $11 billion in 1995 to $12.9 billion in 1996. The number of deals rose from 560 to more than 600, according to KPMG Corporate Finance.

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Expatriate games

Nurses go to Saudi for money and fun, but it can all go wrong. **Sarah Boseley** and **Kathy Evans** report

SAUDI Arabia's dry heat hits a blinding 49C during the day, and plummets to below freezing at night. The desert kingdom is a place of wild extremes — where alcohol, drugs and the mixing of the sexes are utterly forbidden in public and yet where parties rage privately throughout the night.

For the 30,000 British workers living there, including hundreds of young, single nurses, Saudi is alternately a place of grim oppression and illicit excitement. At times, it can all go very badly wrong.

It has before, when Helen Smith was found dead in 1979 after an all-night party. She was gruesomely impaled on iron railings under the balcony of a British surgeon's flat. Now it has gone wrong for Lucille McLauchlan and Deborah Parry, the two British nurses charged with murdering their Australian colleague, Yvonne Gilford, at the King Fahd medical complex in Dhahran.

Such disasters cause public and private worlds to collide in a clash of cultures. In 1979 Penny and Richard Arnot spent some months in jail for holding the illegal drinks party where Helen Smith was a guest; they narrowly escaped a flogging. McLauchlan and Parry face higher penalties: if convicted under *sharia* law they could be beheaded.

For the most part, the Saudi authorities avert their eyes from expats' extra-curricular activities. As long as the Brits, Americans, Scandinavians and the rest toe the moral line on the streets, they can do what they like in the privacy of their own homes.

It suits both cultures to cordon off the potentially pernicious foreign influence in closed expats' compounds — fenced off with high walls and heavy security on the gates. The compound acts like a safety valve, where expatriates can let their hair down without falling foul of Saudi law.

The compounds began in the forties, with the construction of the Aramco oil company headquarters in Dhahran. Thousands of Americans were able to live virtually an American life-style, unconstrained by strict Saudi laws. Fifteen years ago, women were even allowed to drive within the compound — unheard of outside.

Many Americans hardly ever left such compounds — and the story goes that there were even some who felt so secure that they tried to come back after a disillusioned retirement in the States.

Saudi Arabia has some of the harshest codes governing social behaviour in the world — codes which foreigners must obey. Outside the compound, single men and women are forbidden to mix at the workplace or even take taxis together. Even the local McDonalds is segregated between the sexes. The Committee for Encouraging Virtue and Preventing Vice and the religious police, Mutawwah, exist to enforce these laws.

Women are forbidden to drive and must not be seen in the company of a man who is not a close relative — husband, brother or father. "I couldn't go anywhere without being chaperoned by a man," said Anne Froelich, whose husband got a job at a Saudi university.

"I think what I hated was this feeling of being caged," she said. Her one delight was the women's day at the zoo. Her husband would drop her with her two little daughters. Once inside, all the Saudi women would unveil — the only men allowed were the religious police. It was a happy time.

The Dhahran airbase is famous among expats. The Saudi authorities turned a blind eye to its pubs and discos. Drinking is the biggest expat pastime. Somehow the Johnny Walker Black Label, changing hands at $120 a bottle, makes its way past the authorities into the compounds. And then there is the local hooch, distilled everywhere and called *saddiqi*, which translates as "my friend". Most often served with tonic, E and T as it is known, it is not a drink for the moderate.

But it is not generally mild men and women who elect to spend a couple of years under the Saudi desert sun. They have usually gone for the money: not only are salaries high to reflect the difficulty of living in Saudi, but most workers can live on their allowances and expenses, and bank large sums back home — or offshore.


Lucille McLauchlan faces murder charges in Saudi Arabia

A NURSE IS paid about $23,000 on average in the UK. Nurses like McLauchlan and Parry could bank at least $26,500 tax-free in Saudi, with more for their speciality — both worked in a renal unit at the King Fahd. Then they were provided with free accommodation, meals and annual tickets home. Many nurses enjoy the contrast of the hi-tech, brilliantly equipped Saudi hospitals after the cash-strapped problems of the health service in the UK.

It is not just the money; there is excitement, too. "The social life is great out there," said a spokeswoman for one agency, Angel International. Life as an expatriate, she explained, offered the chance to mix with dozens of nationalities, and plenty of unmarried men, most of whom are highly paid.

Some expats are walking away from crisis or disaster, such as the end of a relationship. Others want a radical change to their life. They may find what they want, or they may not. Nursing is the only work in Saudi available to women. To the expat bachelors who vastly outnumber them, they represent the only available "screwing fodder".

It is a heady mix. There is every temptation to break all the ordinary social rules, let alone the stringent Saudi variety. "It is an unreal world," said one female expat. "You know you don't belong there. You can behave badly because you can leave it all behind you." As yet we do not know McLauchlan and Parry's motivation for moving to Saudi, except that McLauchlan was out of a job. There have been newspaper reports that she was dismissed from her job at Dundee Teaching Hospital for gross misconduct following a police investigation into theft. Her family have vigorously denied that she was involved. Nor do we know to what extent the two women may have been tied into the kind of expat life led by so many others.

What we do know is that, ironically in the context of such a strictly moral country, for many British expats Saudi Arabia offers a high octane life. The Arnots' party, back in 1979, neither broke nor formed a mould.

What did emerge from the glimpse past the compound wall that the case of Helen Smith offered was a taste of the entangled lives of the expats. Penny Arnot, for all the solid front she presented with her surgeon husband at the time, later admitted she was having an affair with a scuba-diver. Helen herself was worried she might be pregnant by her Malaysian male nurse lover.

The Saudi experience is a game of high risks for the more volatile players. There will be many who spend their time sitting quietly at home, saving up the cash, watching the BBC on satellite television and refusing all temptation. But for others, it can end in floggings or jail.

In 1988, a British husband and wife were charged with the murder of another nurse, a 48 year-old Irish matron called Helen Feeney. The motive was allegedly theft. In court, Peter and Monica Hall mounted a bitter attack on the Saudis, claiming they had been tricked into a video confession with promises that they would be sent home for trial. Peter got 10 years, Monica 8 years. Had it not been for the victim's family pleading for mercy, they would have been beheaded.

For McLauchlan and Parry all the heady excitement, the fun and adventure have evaporated now in the Saudi prison where they have been held since December 11 without access to a lawyer or even consular officials. The two nurses are said by a Saudi newspaper to have confessed, a claim their families dispute.

There are those, including the victim's brother, who would say that if they killed their friend and colleague, they deserve the Saudi sword. Frank Gilford has said he will not ask for mercy to be exercised. But two nurses and their families will all be on their knees now, praying that justice can be meted out back in England instead.

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Insects such as this eyed hawk moth seemingly defy the laws of physics when they fly PHOTO JOHN MASON

Moth wing beats coptors every time

Tim Radford

THE scientists who confirmed that bumble bees cannot fly — at least according to conventional aerodynamics — have done it again.

They tethered a huge hawk moth in a windtunnel and watched it seemingly defy the laws of physics. Insect flight — with a bulky body and fragile wings — has always been a puzzle. The researchers found out why the hawk moth flies better than a Tiger Moth, and confirmed once again that nature is a step or two ahead of the aviation engineers.

Their discovery, reported in Nature magazine, could send a buzz through the helicopter industry and put flight designers in a spin.

Charles Ellington of Cambridge, and colleagues from Tokyo, Amsterdam and Oxford, slipped a thread round the waist of the hawk moth *Manduca sexta* and tied it to a hollow tube in a windtunnel. They then pumped non-toxic smoke through it and watched the way it swirled as the insect beat its wings.

"We did study bumble bees — you know that old chestnut? — and sure enough they cannot fly according to conventional aerodynamics. We needed a big insect, and this thing has a tenth of a metre wingspan, and flaps its wings relatively slowly, about 25 or 26 times a second, so that made it much easier to see what is going on," Mr Ellington said.

The moth's wings were at a large angle of attack, which meant that the creature should stall after a certain amount of movement. The researchers monitored both the moth and a mechanical model 10 times bigger but moving its wings 100 times more slowly, so that it generated exactly the same lift force.

They found the moth got extra "lift" from the air swirling around the wing's leading edge on the downstroke, and this vortex — a region of low pressure — augmented the lift two or three times more than expected.

Having identified the phenomenon, Mr Ellington went to the library to see if the aviation industry had any studies of it: "They don't and I don't see why not. If we could increase the thrust of a propeller two or three times it would be worth doing."

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

HOW can I become a gay icon?

IT USED to be so easy. Especially for women. For instant gay appeal, stack your hair, drink too much, take drugs, have disastrous relationships with men. In fact, do everything your mother warned you not to do as a child. Male icons were either closet faggots, historical figures like Byron and Oscar Wilde, or classically good-looking film stars.

But now the Pink Paper's weekly Queer Icons column holds up an object or person of gay desire whose only qualification is, typically, being utterly devoid of merit. Some recent examples: newsreader Anna Ford, Britt Ekland ("glorious acting career and much shagging of famous blokes") and, even more inexplicably, Guy Fawkes. — *Paul Clements, Editor, the Pink Paper*

I HAVE heard that if you pass enough electricity through a pickled cucumber it glows bright green. How do I demonstrate it without endangering my life?

IN SOUTH London pickled cucumbers used to be called "wallys". I would guess that the name refers to the last person to try this experiment. — *Lorna Eller, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire*

A PICKLED cucumber will glow if you pass electricity through it — the Inspire Science Squad use a specially constructed "Pickle Blaster", which puts 240 volts mains electricity through the pickle. It consists of a wooden frame with two metal spikes — on which we mount the pickle — connected to a standard 13-amp plug. Incidentally, the pickles glow orange, not green, due to a sodium emission effect. — *Ian Simmons, Director, Inspire Hands-on Science Centre, Norwich, Norfolk*

BY PERCENTAGE, which consumer item shows the greatest difference between cost of manufacture and sale price?

WATER costs nothing to manufacture as it falls from the sky as rain and may be collected and used by anyone, therefore the percentage difference between cost and sale price is infinite, whatever the sale price. Payment for water covers the cost of neutralisation of contaminants introduced after production, storage and transport costs (reservoirs and pipelines) and water company profits. — *Colin Moretti, Sunbury on Thames, Middlesex*

A SINGLE cigarette. Cost of manufacture — probably less than one penny. You pay for it with your life. — *Matthew Payne, Hampton, Middlesex*

Any answers?

RECENTLY I read of the term "betty-cat". Does anyone have more information? It is an East Anglian term. — *Phyllis Lahti, Moorhead, Minnesota, USA*

HELSINGOR (Hamlet's Elsinore); Helsingborg in Sweden; Helsinki (Helsingfors) — what's the connection? — *Robert Briers, Maidstone, Kent*

IS A man's bladder larger or smaller than that of a woman? — *William Barrett, London*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ

Letter from Japan Jane Norman

Fish out of water

NONE of the fishmongers at the market where Mr Kono went to buy supplies each morning believed that he could be a restaurant proprietor. Where Japanese chefs generally have shaven heads, Mr Kono's hair was long and greasy. His front teeth had been knocked out in a fight. He liked to boast that he had not taken a bath for two years.

We combed the neighbourhood before we found the restaurant. At last we came to a tumbledown hut with a cracked neon sign in front of it advertising Kono's Home Cooking. The bravest member of the party knocked at the door. Mr Kono prided himself on the efforts he made to discourage business. The door was kept locked and customers had to pass an interview before they were admitted.

"Do you promise to keep the rules of the establishment?" demanded a small, fierce man of each of us in turn. We promised to keep the rules, whatever these might be.

The establishment was as unkempt as its owner. Empty fish crates were piled at the entrance. Dirty dishes littered the counter. Streamers of flypaper encrusted with the catch of many years dangled from the ceiling.

There was a single table wedged between an ancient juke box and a wood-burning stove.

"Sit here!" commanded Mr Kono.

We had to crawl to the table under the bend in the chimney. There was no menu. We waited nervously. Mr Kono reappeared with a chopping board, a carving knife and a raw octopus. Out of the blue he seized the wrist of the person nearest to him and drew the carving knife across it. We leapt in our seats. The person who had been attacked clutched his wrist. But the knife had left not a scratch.

"Look, it's blunt!" said Mr Kono triumphantly.

The same knife went on to cut the octopus into bite-sized pieces. Mr Kono explained that the knife had not been washed for twenty years. As for the octopus, it had not seen water since it came out of the sea a week ago. Water, in Mr Kono's opinion, was an overrated element. Fish, like human beings, keep for longer if they are left in their natural oils.

We agreed that we had never tasted such a delicious octopus.

Next he produced a blowfish. One bite of the liver is enough to kill a grown man. By law it must be thrown away. Mr Kono cared little for the law. He cut out the lethal organ with the blunt knife and left it lying on the board, looking curiously tempting, while he distributed the edible part.

The blowfish was every bit as good as the octopus.

"At that man across the lane you would pay 10,000 yen for one of those," said Mr Kono. "I'll charge you 900 yen, if you don't mind."

The man across the lane had trained for eleven years at a famous Kyoto inn. "Spent the first year putting chrysanthemums on the plates!" said Mr Kono scornfully. "What would he know about fish or anything else?"

Mr Kono's knowledge covered a wide range of subjects besides fish. Chinese medicine, biotechnology, the Lotus Sutra, stocks and shares; he could hold forth on anything you cared to mention. He had even knitted the seats of the chairs we were sitting on out of his wife's stockings.

HIS WIFE emerged from the kitchen. Quick as a flash she crushed a passing cockroach with the palm of her hand. When she saw our reaction she harked back to her genteel youth, when she would have screamed at the sight of a cockroach and rued the day she threw in her lot with the neighbourhood pariah.

The man across the lane had recently rebuilt his premises, knocking down the old wooden house and replacing it with a three-storey building of prefabricated vinyl. He presented the Konos with a box of soap to apologise for the noise and inconvenience. Then he hinted that Mr Kono might clear away the debris outside the hut now that the neighbourhood had gone up in the world.

"Look at all those dirty dishes!" wailed Mrs Kono. But would he let her wash them with washing up liquid like everybody else? Not him! They had to be soaked in wood ash till the grease dissolved. The roof was leaking in six different places, but he would sleep in a pool of rainwater sooner than mend it, he would. Always blowing his own trumpet...

For her, sadly, the wayward genius she had married no longer held any charm.

A Country Diary

Ray Collier

HIGHLANDS: The success of the reintroduction of the sea eagle and red kite tends to overshadow some serious problems facing conservationists in the Highlands. These are highlighted by the latest attempts by a wide range of people to cull thousands of grey seals in the Western Isles and elsewhere. Ironically, if a cull were contemplated then presumably people would be looking at the two major rookeries, on the Monarch Isles and North Rona — both national nature reserves. However, many people do not realise that grey seals are already culled under licences issued by the Scottish Office, despite the fact that there is no scientific evidence that they are causing serious damage to fisheries. Licences for culling seals is not the only problem however as, in the past few years, hundreds of red-breasted mergansers and goosanders have been shot under licence — once again issued mainly to Fishery Boards. This is despite extensive research that has been unable to produce any evidence that these "sawbills" have done serious damage to fish stocks. Even eider ducks have been shot under licence on the west coast because they had been eating mussels at a fish farm. Local conservation bodies had objected to the siting of the mussel farm because it would be in a known feeding area for large numbers of eider; yet this advice was over-ruled and planning permission was given. And so it is with some dismay that conservationists are awaiting the latest claims for licences to kill birds of prey such as sparrowhawk, hen harrier and peregrine falcon.

Colossus of Italian cinema

Marcello Mastroianni



Mastroianni (left) and Sophia Loren in 1970 on the set in Padua of The Priest's Wife, directed by Dino Risi (centre)

MARCELLO MASTROIANNI, who has died at the age of 72, belonged to a gifted and colourful generation of Italian actors originally discovered and promoted by the director Luchino Visconti.

Mastroianni joined Visconti's theatre company in Rome in 1948 without any formal drama school training. With his striking Mediterranean good looks, he was thought to be the embodiment of the Latin Lover — though he fiercely resisted that in the roles he accepted after Fellini's La Dolce Vita brought him to international stardom in 1960.

Marcello was born in the Ciociaria region, south of Rome, the elder son of a cabinet maker. He was sent out to work in the holidays and since his home was near Cinecittà, where neighbours and relatives laboured in the studio support departments, what could have been more natural than that, from the age of 12, he should become a film extra and bump into the stars? He was, of course, inspired to follow them.

After the liberation of Rome by the Allies towards the end of the second world war, he worked as a clerk for Eagle Lion Films. Wisely, he enrolled with Rome university's commerce and economics faculty to be eligible to join CUT — Centre for University Theatre. There he acted with Giulietta Massina, Fellini's future wife (and key movie star), who enthusiastically introduced him to Fellini; his friendship and canny professional association advanced Mastroianni's career spectacularly.

At CUT, Mastroianni was spotted by one of Visconti's entourage and after an interview with the great man was taken on to his payroll at three times his monthly salary as a clerk. This was important, since his father's long diabetic illness (he died in 1950) meant that Marcello had become the family breadwinner. Money continued to be so tight that when he won the first of his many acting awards — a Nastro d'argento and a Grolla d'oro — for the 1954 film Too Bad She's Bad (which began his enduring screen partnership with Sophia Loren) his mother promptly pawned them.

He soon had family of his own. He married Flora Carabella, an actress in Visconti's company, in 1950, and their daughter, Barbara, arrived a year later. Marcello had a daughter, Chiara, by Catherine Deneuve, his co-star of the early 1970s films It Only Happens To Others and The Slightly Pregnant Man.

In the early 1950s, Mastroianni's growing reputation as a stage actor in Rome helped him to land a number of solid supporting roles on film, usually as good-natured working-class lads. Then with Visconti in 1957 (both as star and co-producer) he made White Nights, based on a Dostoevsky short story.

Fellini appreciated, in their films (La Dolce Vita, 8½, City Of Women, Ginger And Fred, and Intervista), the way that Mastroianni never asked questions and was always ready on set to develop his character by osmosis and instinct. Mastroianni always claimed to be lazy. He more than once said screen acting was "holiday time", whereas the discipline of stage acting made it "school time". But the adventurousness of his roles in more than 130 films through four decades demonstrated time and again that he took screen acting far more seriously than he ever cared to show.

He not only accepted every conceivable role — taxi drivers to doctors, crooks to priests — but formed his own production company to do work that was particularly dear to his heart.

One of the biggest risks he took was in declining the siren call of Hollywood after the success of La Dolce Vita — on the grounds that he could not speak English. And, equally bravely, he returned to the stage both in Italy and France. After a 10-year absence from the theatre he decided, in 1966, aged 42, to play Rudolph Valentino, in Ciao Rudy, a musical biography of the Italian-born heart-throb.

It will be as a screen actor that Mastroianni will always be remembered. What excited him was always the challenge of tackling a completely new and unexpected role — thus when he'd done La Dolce Vita and seemed condemned to play the Latin Lover in perpetuity, he opted instead to play the impotent, latently homosexual Sicilian husband in Mauro Bolognini's Il Bell' Antonio.

His achievement was that of a colossus.

Peter Roberts

Marcello Mastroianni, actor, born September 28, 1924; died December 19, 1996

Beyond the planet

Carl Sagan

NO OTHER scientist of our century has matched the great breadth of imagination, erudition and accessibility of Professor Carl Sagan, the American astronomer, educator and dissident, who has died aged 62 after a long battle with leukaemia.

Trained both as an astronomer and biologist, Sagan was a true polymath, able to do much more than illuminate the place of mankind in the universe. He could carry the mind of everyman into orbit with a comet, perceive the probability and structure of other life-forms, and, with equal impact, unravel the atmospheric and climatic consequences of nuclear war and other bleak human follies.

When firmly on the earth, his lectures reached beyond specialist aspects of astronomy or the origins of life to the many key and complex issues facing humanity. As his 1980 Cosmos television series will confirm far into the future, he was a public educator of great importance. He wrote, co-authored or edited more than 20 books.

He was the son of a Russian-born garment manufacturer and was born in New York City. His interest in astronomy was kindled in New Jersey high school and he graduated with a physics degree from Chicago university in 1954. His first works were published soon after and his doctorate, in astronomy and astrophysics, followed in 1960. He joined the faculty at Harvard in 1962. In 1968 he went to Cornell university, where he set up a planetary studies laboratory.

In the 1960s he began studying the surface and atmosphere of Venus. Sagan, bringing the notion of the "greenhouse gas effect" into currency, showed that existing hypotheses were wrong, and went on to calculate that the planet must have a high surface temperature. His hypothesis resolved all conflicts and, although initially controversial, both the mechanisms and the calculation were eventually accepted and shown to be correct.

During the 1960s spaceflight was developing rapidly. He played a leading role in the development and instrumentation of the Mariner, Viking, Voyager and Galileo spacecraft expeditions to the planets, achieving acclaim for his studies of windblown dust as an explanation of seasonal changes on Mars.

His involvement in the search for life-forms on other planets and fearless discussion of extra-terrestrial civilisations often infuriated conventional astronomers. But in 1966, jointly with the Soviet astronomer L S Shklovskii in Intelligent Life In The Universe, he foresaw and preempted their criticisms.

Sagan's imaginative reaches into the possibilities of extra-terrestrial life were accompanied by biological experiments that attempted to simulate the earth's early atmosphere and the creation of the chemistry of life. Irradiating a mixture of methane, ammonia and hydrogen sulphide he was able to produce amino acids and sugars, and nucleic acids, all common constituents of present day life-forms. He showed that formaldehydes were produced and that, intriguingly, the experiments also produced traces of adenosine triphosphate (ATP), a compound of crucial importance as an energy store in the biochemistry of living cells.

With a vigour and a seemingly insatiable appetite for controversy, he took on all-comers in a battle to educate the public in the exercise of reason, stressing the importance of science and imagination and the roles of astronomy, cosmology and biology in understanding mankind's place in the vastness of the universe.

Later, as a matter of urgency he sought to promote understanding of the human predicament on earth. It was inevitable that, in the nuclear-stressed 1980s, his knowledge of planetary atmospheres and dynamics would play a central role in analysis of nuclear weapon effects. The startling, indeed frightening, outcome, published as Nuclear Winter: Global Consequences Of Multiple Nuclear Explosions (1983), triggered a huge scientific controversy which remains unresolved. The notion that nuclear war would change climate and cripple world agriculture has had a salutary effect on political thinking.

His popular books stretch the imagination, buttress arguments with impeccable science, and carry us into the philosophies of early civilisations.

Anthony Tucker

Carl Sagan, scientist, born November 9, 1934; died December 20, 1996

In the house of jazz

Ronnie Scott

THE CUSTOMERS at Ronnie Scott's Soho jazz club knew him as a laconic, wisecracking, chain-smoking loner in a leather jacket, the very model of a modern jazz musician. He would announce the arrival of performers such as Coleman Hawkins and Dizzy Gillespie in an exasperated, gravelly east London drawl, as if their presence on his premises were somehow interrupting some absorbing private pursuit.

But another image of Ronnie Scott, who has died aged 69, emerged with familiarity and time. It was of a complex, romantic, erudite and sometimes obsessive perfectionist of intuitive musicality, and an unpredictably anarchic wit worlds away from the steadily recycled and sometimes rather dubious stand-up routine he used as the front-man in "the office".

Scott presented himself as a man nothing touched. There was one resounding exception — his respect and admiration for fellow jazz-players, in celebration of whose achievements he set up his club.

Scott was himself a fine saxophone player, respected for his rounded, faintly dolorous sound and improvising fluency by the best on the world stage, but it was the club that made his name internationally. The mix of upmarket, supper-club intimacy and tatty low-life bohemianism combined the priorities of Scott and his long-time friend, former saxophone partner and business associate Pete King. Scott's yardstick was simply to imagine the kind of place he would be happy to be in himself, with the emphasis on creating an environment that suited musicians, and which was devoted to appreciative listening. The inspiration for the atmosphere came from the 52nd Street New York jazz scene of the young Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis that Scott had visited in the forties and fifties (as an itinerant musician playing Atlantic liners), and from British surrealist comedy too. The mixture made the club unique.

He was born Ronald Schatt in Aldgate, east London, at the heart of what was then one of the biggest Jewish communities in western Europe. His father, Joseph Schatt, was a high-class saxophone player and orchestra leader who worked under the name of Jock Scott. He was an urbane, humorous, charismatic and hard-gambling man who left home early in his son's life. Ronnie was brought up by his mother, Cissie, and his grandmother.

Ronnie took up the saxophone as a teenager, was taught by Vera Lynn's uncle, Jack Lewis, learned precociously fast, and began sitting in at Soho clubs from the age of 16.

Scott and most of the nightclub professionals of his own age were bored with dance music. In December 1948, a group, including Scott, opened the tatty basement Club Eleven, to promote an all-bop policy. It closed 18 months later after a drugs squad visit but the excitement of the club gave Scott a dream of a London nightclub that could house this unruly music and its growing body of fans.

In 1959 he opened the first jazz club to bear his name, a basement in Chinatown's Gerrard Street. During the sixties, an extraordinary procession of jazz heroes and heroines crossed the battered stage at 39 Gerrard Street — virtually all of the jazz stars of the day save Miles Davis, who was never to play a season at a Ronnie Scott club. Scott used to refer obliquely to Davis's intractability with the announcement: "That was a tune by the great trumpeter Miles Davis, who once said to me... 'get out of the way'."

The club expanded in the sixties to the present Frith Street premises. It weathered the eclipse of jazz, prospered in its return to favour over the past 10 years, and teetered on the edge of bankruptcy in between. Scott had several long relationships (two of which produced a son, Nicholas, and a daughter, Rebecca) but he felt that the "family" represented by the inner sanctum of his club was his most natural circle. "I love this club, it's just like home — filthy and full of strangers."

When the 30th birthday of the club was celebrated in 1989, Scott avoided sentimentality and took refuge in the quip: "It's like a prison sentence. Thirty years in a jazz club."

John Fordham

Ronnie Scott, musician and club-owner, born January 28, 1927; died December 23, 1996

Brush with genius

CINEMA
Derek Malcolm

IF YOU judge **Surviving Picasso** as a biography of the century's greatest artist, you may be unhappy with Anthony Hopkins's physical portrait of the man, with the side the film takes in the saint-or-sinner debate, and with the absence of any of Picasso's paintings.

You will, however, be comforted to find that Hopkins's portrait is extraordinarily watchable, that Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's screenplay, based on Arianna Stassinopoulos's Picasso: Creator And Destroyer, puts that book's arguments more subtly, and that, while the Picasso Trust blocked the use of his paintings, there are plenty of others to wonder at. And the film is a fascinating treatise on what attracts women to powerful men, and how those men treat them.

Picasso believes that the Deity has allowed him not only to create great art but to pursue experimentation well beyond its known bounds. Totally absorbed in the struggle, he needs women to revolve round him like dutiful servants. It's not so much selfishness as the certainty that nothing matters but the task in hand.

The film's story is told through the eyes of Françoise Girot, the artist who becomes Picasso's lover after visiting his studio, bears him two children, has enough trials and tribulations to sink most women but is strong enough to come out relatively intact.

It is quite a part for any actress, let alone an inexperienced one. But Natascha McElhone's performance is one of the film's chief pleasures, suggesting both the coquettish charm that attracted Picasso and the independence of mind that enabled her to survive.

Hopkins mixes egotism with a charm that would transfix most women. The strength of both the film and the performance is that he first shows Picasso to be anything but a monster, then slowly underlines the point that at least half of him was just that.

The film is not James Ivory's most subtle effort, and a lot of questions are never fully answered. But the bones of it hold up extremely well, and there's the bonus of a fine supporting cast. Joss Ackland gives a brilliant cameo of Matisse, the only man who can look Picasso in the face as a peer. Joan Plowright plays Girot's grandmother, Peter Eyre the painter's terminally put-upon assistant, Julianne Moore the mistress whom Girot supplants, and Diane Venora his second wife.

The film looks good, although deliberately not as rich as some others made by Ivory. And, as usual, Richard Robbins's score is first-class. Altogether, it is far better than I expected. I couldn't imagine how this particular film-maker could get at the passion behind Picasso's life and work. Perhaps he doesn't. But he does show us, in a totally unmelodramatic and sometimes unemotional way, a man obsessed and a woman who, if she never defeated him, became at least his equal in the battle for her life.

A taste for youthful flesh . . . Anthony Hopkins plays Picasso as yet another charming monster

After watching **Daylight**, Sylvester Stallone's new opus, I realised why Jim Abrahams and the Zuckers did so well parodying disaster movies.

Daylight is about what might happen if fire, and then water, trapped travellers using the Holland Tunnel in New York. And it unintentionally chimes in with the Channel Tunnel's near-disaster. But that's as far as reality goes.

Stallone plays a disgraced emergency worker who gets to lead the rescue of the few survivors because he knows every inch of the terrain. Naturally, he performs miracles — and with equipment that seems to materialise out of thin air. But they don't include explaining Leslie Bohem's script. The louder he barks his orders — and there's a lot of noise about — the more fuddled his diction becomes. Nobody, however, says, "What?" The assortment of terrified blast victims just follow him around like grateful dogs, now and then doubting his judgment. In fact, there is a grateful dog in the picture and, be assured, the hound gets saved.

Rob Cohen, director of Dragonheart, has changed gear with what one might call aplomb, if it wasn't for the fact that the film gets sillier the longer it goes on.

FIRST, of course, we are introduced to the people who are going to be killed or trapped. They're an odd lot, including aspiring writer Amy Brenneman, nice cop Stan Shaw, a quarrelling family (Jay Sanders, Karen Young and Danielle Harris), Viggo Mortensen's tycoon and Claire Bloom's society doyenne. Add a police-vanload of miscreants and you have the material for a potboiler that depends more on special effects than on those caught up in them.

I must say that the firestorm in the tunnel, caused by escaping crooks bashing into a chemical truck, is pretty terrifying. It almost justifies the whole movie. And it's also quite something when Stallone is lowered into the tunnel through a series of huge fans that can only be turned off for a few seconds at a time. But then the man starts to talk, and the victims to behave like they always do in this sort of epic — like neurotic New Yorkers would. They are completely unable to form a decent British-style queue when Stallone finds them an exit.

The resulting disappointment owes something to the fact that Cohen is not really a dab hand at this sort of thing, and Sly is now a bit past his sell-by date. It is a mundane effort after a promising start.

Abbas Kiarostami, Iran's premier director as far as foreign festivals are concerned and the recipient of a good many prizes, got nothing at Cannes for **Through The Olive Trees**. Apparently the jury didn't understand it.

It's the closing part of a trilogy about Iranian life, which takes in the struggles of a people decimated first by war with Iraq, then by a series of earthquakes. But Kiarostami, who has a remarkable way of steering his films through the maze of Iranian censorship, is not a purely naturalistic film-maker.

He presents us with a film crew arriving at a devastated village to start shooting And Life Goes On (the second part of the trilogy). A young bricklayer is given a small role, and finds himself cast as the husband of the girl he has adored from afar. Now he has his chance. That sliver of a plotline is paralleled by the film-maker's efforts to marshal the crowds of locals, to select his cast from dozens of shrouded and giggling women (a wonderful scene) and to traverse the spectacular terrain with an observant and lyrical eye.

As the film within the film progresses, you get a real sense of a people somehow living their difficult lives with heroic stoicism and no little humour. For those who can fathom Kiarostami's rather severe, elliptical style, Through The Olive Trees will be hard to forget.

Instruments of delight

MUSICAL
Michael Billington

THE NATIONAL is supposedly a repertory theatre. But whatever reservations one has about the policy of giving Guys And Dolls a straight run at London's South Bank, until Easter are outweighed by the sheer vitality of Richard Eyre's production.

It helps, of course, that the show is a classic. A musical is only as good as its book and this one, adapted from Damon Runyon's Broadway fables, has a sublime wit. Even the fundamental idea is witty: that a tough professional gambler like Sky Masterson, who accepts a bet that he cannot date a mission-doll, should turn out to be a Bible-quoting Galahad with a sense of honour that makes him a natural soul-saving recruit.

On top of that the show brims with great lines: when the Hot Box girl, Miss Adelaide, says of her long-time, crap-shooting fiancé, Nathan Detroit: "I always thought how wonderful he would be if he was a different man," it says something about the eternal battle of the sexes. And Frank Loesser's music and lyrics grow organically out of the story-line, taking us back to an era when musicals were not overweening pop-operas but instruments of delight pitched halfway between reality and fantasy. Eyre's production, John Gunter's astonishing neon-lit designs and David Toguri's unbeatable choreography capture precisely that blend of reality and fable.

The cast is every bit as good as it was in 1982 — sometimes better. Imelda Staunton, formerly a Hot Box hoofer, has graduated to a perfect Miss Adelaide, slightly vulgar, sadly vulnerable and sassily intelligent. Henry Goodman's Nathan Detroit is the epitome of the small-time fixer, Clarke Peters lends Sky a fine mixture of charm and natural conscience and Clive Rowe, eyes always lighting up at the prospect of nibbles, is an ideal Nicely-Nicely.

This is a superb show that comes up fresh as paint and proves that the musical can be not just a source of pleasure but also a work of art.

Why, why, why Delilah?

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

IN MY opinion the lion should have won. If at this early stage of the proceedings the lion had eaten Liz Hurley, he would have suffered serious indigestion from all those dangly bits in her hair but we would have been spared several more hours of **Samson And Delilah** (Sky One).

As things turned out, when Diana Rigg, Samson's grey-haired old mother, saw the claw marks down his chest, she instantly said: "You haven't been fighting over a woman have you?" As any mother would.

Sudan the lion, trained by Hubert G Wells (an unexpected sort of name for a lion trainer), turned in a powerful performance. You will be eager to know how Liz Hurley acquitted herself as Delilah. She played it with a flirtatious drawl that was a touching tribute to Mae West.

Once she sucked her finger cutely. Once she peeped roguishly over a helmet. Let's say Hugh Grant would have been just as good as Samson.

Sky, who are doing the whole Old Testament, excluding the boring bits, say that the difference between their Samson And Delilah and Hollywood's lies in the high artistic demands placed on the production. No, seriously.

Samson And Delilah is, in fact, faithful, authentic, respectable and well written. So am I, but people don't queue round the block to see me.

They queued for DeMille's Samson And Delilah. Groucho said that Victor Mature's Samson had bigger tits than Delilah. (As I once interviewed Victor Mature in the shower, I can confirm this.)

Samson And Delilah has already been shown in the United States, and everything the critics said is true. When something exciting threatens to happen, the camera has an epileptic fit. The cast of all nations (and the insistent tootling of primitive and, doubtless, authentic instruments) make the dialogue a bit of a lottery. Jale Arikan's lines are often anyone's guess. I walked warily around "Open your ass!" several times before I got it.

After Sudan, the next best thing is Samson's wedding. It was more like Gazza than Gaza, what with the bridegroom tearing up a tree by the roots, pulling down a wall with his teeth and flinging half the wedding guests over a cliff. That'll teach them to spoil his riddle: "Out of the strong came forth sweetness."

The Earl of Gowrie, chairman of the Arts Council, made his acting debut as a vampire in **Nightmare: The Birth Of Horror** (BBC1). Vanishing, to universal relief, through a trap door.

This is the unexpected sort of stuff you learn from Christopher Frayling's little series, which covers Frankenstein, Dracula and Jekyll And Hyde. It is a rich cut-and-come-again cake, intelligent, indefatigable and fun.

Strange that it was neither Shelley nor Byron who wrote Frankenstein and the first story about vampires. It was the unregarded ones, Shelley's wife and Byron's doctor, Polidori.

Polidori was the uncle of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (and not many people know that). Seven years after Rossetti buried his wife, Lizzie, with a book of love poems, he exhumed her. To retrieve the poems. She was still luminescently lovely but, as the air touched her, she began to decompose.

The deliquescent Lizzie was probably an influence on Bram Stoker's Dracula. The charismatic Henry Irving certainly was. When Irving came on stage in The Bells saying vibrantly "It is I!" no one needed to consult the cast list.

Stoker worshipped him, worked for him and wrote Dracula for him. Possibly about him. It was, said Frayling, who was enjoying himself, a part Irving could have got his teeth into.

In fact Irving listened to a read through, said "Dreadful!" and left. Of course it is dreadful. At one point, I found I had stopped breathing.

Thoughts from Today

John Humphrys

The Guardian Year 1996
ed Georgina Henry
Fourth Estate 276pp £12.99

IT IS the proud boast on Radio 4's Today programme that if you listen to us every day you don't need to buy a newspaper. That's nonsense, of course, but I suppose it depends on what you mean by "need". If all you want is the latest news, then it probably is true. I have a theory about why we switch on the radio and television to "get the news". Most of the time we listen not to find out what has happened, but to find out what has not happened.

Ah, the Queen Mother hasn't died; a jumbo jet hasn't fallen out of the skies on to London; John Major hasn't resigned again. So that's alright then, we can carry on with what we were doing.

When there is hard, breaking news then Today will beat the papers. However fancy their latest technology, they still have to print and deliver the thing — and while they're doing that we're busy broadcasting.

So we don't "need" newspapers for the news and we haven't ever since Marconi saw what you could do with radio waves. Happily for the Guardian we need them for one or two other things.

What you don't get on Today are the eviscerating skills of some writers or the sheer genius of a Steve Bell. We can't do any of that because, well, cartoonists on radio lack a certain something, and because the closest Today gets to sanctioned opinion (as opposed to opinionated interviewees) is Thought for the Day. And we all know what happens when our Thinkers stray from the theological into the political. So we leave it to the papers. And that's another reason we need them.

They do everything we cannot do and all of that is, I'm happy to say, in The Guardian Year 1996. Or, rather, most of it is. Before I praise the content, may I bemoan the gaps. I have about as much interest in sport as Tony Blair does in Das Kapital but Vincent Hanna makes me laugh. Bizarrely, he gets a mention in the publicity blurb that accompanies the book, but is not included in the book itself. Why not?

Even so Georgina Henry, who edited the anthology, has made a remarkably good stab at an impossible job. How do you select a couple of dozen columns and cartoons from more than 300 editions of a newspaper stuffed with goodies almost every day?

The only rule I would follow is to acknowledge that there are some writers who simply cannot be left out. Imagine the Guardian without Nancy Banks-Smith? Unthinkable. Who else could review Pride and Prejudice by imagining what happens to the characters after the book has ended: Bingley and Jane as the Start-Rite tots toddling off into the sunset; Mr Darcy allowing Elizabeth to put penguins in the Pemberley lake. "Come and see the Penguins of Pemberley."

Banks-Smith is a national treasure and must never be allowed to retire.

Simon Hoggart has had an extraordinarily good year, too, and is rightfully included. OK, I know it's easy to make fun of politicians (God knows they provide plenty of material) but it's not easy to do it day in and day out and still be original. He managed to get the spin doctors bang to rights: "Not only are we being told what to think; we are now being told what we already think."

I'm conscious that I have scarcely touched on all the important journalism in The Guardian Year 1996: the political shrewdness of Hugo Young and Michael White, the stylish and thoughtful writing of Henry Porter. The latter's lamentation on the way in which intellectual values and learning are haemorrhaging from our culture should be required reading for every hack and every head teacher in the land.

So, as I said at the start, you don't need to buy a newspaper if you listen to Today. Just so long as you have someone else to buy it for you.

John Humphrys presents BBC Radio 4's Today programme

Paperbacks

Nicholas Lezard

Ballad of the Salt Sea, by Hugo Pratt, trs Ian Monk (Harvill, £9.99)

"WHEN I want to relax I read an essay by Engels; when I want something more serious, I read Corto Maltese," runs a quote from Umberto Eco on the back. Of course, he might have been kidding. Corto Maltese is the hero of this black and white *bande dessinée* that first appeared in France 21 years ago — an ambiguously moral pirate (this is 1914) whose confederates include a baddie with a beard called Rasputin and a faceless man in a hood called The Monk. Tintin for grown-ups, sort of.

Flaubert In Egypt, by Gustave Flaubert, trs, ed and int Francis Steegmuller (Penguin Classics, £6.99)

MASTERFULLY compiled from Flaubert's letters and notes with supplements from his companion Maxime du Camp's memoirs "That night we returned to Kuchuk Hanem's [a famous courtesan]... When it was time to leave I didn't leave . . . I sucked her furiously — her body was covered with sweat — she was tired after dancing — she was cold. I covered her with my pelisse, and she fell asleep with her fingers in mine. As for me, I scarcely shut my eyes." When he came back he wrote Madame Bovary.

In Search of Lost Time, by Marcel Proust: Volume 1: Swann's Way, trs C K Scott Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin rev D J Enright (Vintage, £7.99)

THERE is probably a tedious story, involving publishers' fighting, royalties and contracts, behind the fact that we have had to wait nearly five years for this revised translation to get into paperback. The point is that the most up-to-date, faithful English-language edition of the century's second most important book (by the French Anthony Powell, as an ex-friend once facetiously called Proust) is now finally available in an edition which can just about fit in your pocket, if you push. The differences, post- and pre-Enright, you might find a little subtle: "Sometimes, when I had put out my candle, my eyes would close so quickly that I had not even time to say to myself: 'I'm falling asleep.'" (Pre-Enright.) "Sometimes, the candle barely out, my eyes closed so quickly that I did not have time to tell myself: 'I'm falling asleep.'" (Enright.) But they help make up a version which has carried me through more of the work than anything hitherto. There are five further volumes of this, which I am not going to pretend I have read, but the whole work constitutes a really major, significant achievement.

If you would like to order the six-volume set of In Search Of Lost Time at the discount price of £39.95 (a saving of £8), contact Books@TheGuardianWeekly

Appetite for life

Rowley Leigh

Hungry for You: From Cannibalism to Seduction, A Book of Food
by Joan Smith
Chatto & Windus 393pp £17.99

"WHAT I am interested in is the big themes," writes Joan Smith in the introduction to her unusual anthology of writing about food, Hungry For You. Misleading as such a title is bound to be, and with a cover reminiscent of a Häagen-Dazs advertisement, it's even a misnomer to call this a book about food: this is a book about eating, and about our attitudes to food, rather than food itself. True, there is a chapter of food eulogy, a kind of sunlit upland inhabited by Proust, Duke Ellington, Elizabeth David and Joan Smith herself, but it sits a little oddly with the rest of the book, whose "big themes" amount largely to a catalogue of denial and taboo that makes fascinating reading.

She starts at the right place, at hunger, and the sheer need to eat. "Hunger hardens people's hearts; it also anaesthetises the emotions of those who have to endure it," she writes, but passages of Primo Levi, Marguerite Duras and others defy the reader to remain unaffected. From hunger through circumstance we wander through to hunger through choice, and the frontiers with the "obsession" of dieting become a little blurred.

Greed: Scene from the Table of the Seven Deadly Sins (detail), by Hieronymus Bosch BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY

Byron was an early dieter, but then he was funny about food generally. He was distressed if women consumed anything but lobster salad and a little champagne in his company. This fear of the animal in the opposite sex was mirrored by his obsession with his own condition. His denial took many forms; "I swelled at one time to 14 stone, so I clapped a muzzle on my jaws, and like the hibernating animals, consumed my own fat." He would binge on a "horrid mess of cold potatoes, rice, fish, or greens, deluged in vinegar, and gobble it up like a famished dog". When it was suggested he might as well binge on better fare, he claimed "I have advantage over you, I have no palate; one thing is as good as another to me".

Such a denial of the pleasure of eating is by no means uncommon, but is perhaps especially English, and it is a shame that Joan Smith does not attempt much analysis of our particularly strange attitudes, or why North Europeans generally are less good at dealing with the sensual pleasure of eating. But then, she has a lot on her plate. Sex is wheeled on after hunger, and there's no shortage of material, whether it's Lucy Ellmann's sublime "Hull, pod, shell, bone, fillet", or Henry Fielding's monstrous "what is commonly called love, namely the desire of satisfying a voracious appetite with a certain quantity of delicate white human flesh".

A taste for flesh comes in many forms, none more bizarre than that of the determined home cook Jeffrey Dahmer, slain, to no one's annoyance, in a jail in Wisconsin in 1994. "He had stored lungs, intestines, a kidney and a liver in his freezer," wrote Jonathan Freedland in the Guardian after his death. "Pointing out the heart of one victim, Dahmer told police he was saving the organ "to eat later". Prosecutors believed that Jeffrey Dahmer was serious about his cannibalism.

BESIDES the contents of his freezer, they found no food in apartment 213 — only condiments. Chilling stuff, whereas the famous survivors of the Andean plane crash, revived here by two gripping chunks of Piers Paul Read's Alive, emerge as heroes who conquer a taboo in order to survive.

With poisoning and dieting rounding up the sextet of themes, the reader will have grasped that this is not a bedtime book for menu-planning, although there is an "epilogue consisting of a meagre collection of the author's favourite recipes". As she confesses in A Culinary Virgin, food came late into the author's life. As a child she was pathetically thin: "It wasn't that I was anorexic, bulimic, or suffering from any other identifiable eating disorder: I simply hadn't learnt to like food. My mother's cooking was plain and sensible, prepared in deference to her stomach ulcer and her absolute aversion, which she shared with my father, to foreign food." With the zeal of the born again, she parades her recipes like a sign of the faith.

There is no question that this enthusiasm has led the author to cast her net far and wide. There is stuff from Plutarch and The Thousand And One Nights, from Sigmund Freud and the Fourth Lateran Council, and a lot of very recent writing. The only common strand, rarely broken, is that food is a marginal concern to most of the writers represented. This gives it an added value, for one is introduced to much that is new. It's a pleasure to read Nora Ephron on potatoes, or to be reminded, albeit too briefly, of Bret Easton Ellis; "A chunky red salsa is smeared across the top of the plate — which is white and porcelain and two feet wide — to give the appearance of a sunset but it looks like one big gunshot wound to me." Food does that to people sometimes.

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Thousands of fans rushed to buy Patrick O'Brian's 18th novel. But it wasn't always like this for 'the best writer you've never heard of', says **Martin Walker**

All fans on deck

LIGHT WINDS from the south, and the captain's steward is serving the coffee as the sailors start scouring the decks clean with a bear, a stone slab laden with cannon-balls. And as the Channel haze clears in the early morning off Ushant, the signal flags flutter from the farthest frigate. The French are out! Their fleet is in the Goulet and to the order of "Beat to Quarters", the British ships wear in turn to give battle.

That scene could have been set at any time in the last 50 years by a handful of authors, the laureates of that most overworked seam of historical fiction, Nelson's Royal Navy in the Napoleonic wars. C S Forester launched the genre with his Horatio Hornblower novels, and then lesser writers brought in their substitutes, from Ramage to Bolitho.

But in the hands of Patrick O'Brian, a delightful old gentleman of 82 whose fans pray he will keep writing forever, the genre has been transformed. O'Brian has crafted something extraordinary from the naval tradition. And in the process, he has inspired a phenomenon at the higher end of popular culture.

When O'Brian visits the United States these days, he is shown around the Supreme Court by his fan, Mr Justice Kennedy. When he wants to see the US Capitol, senators vie to oblige. At the great US naval base of Newport News, where 700 fans queued to get into a crowded lecture hall to see him, O'Brian was feted by the most powerful admiral of all time, Cinclant, the commander of the Atlantic fleet and Nato's naval forces.



Master seaman . . . 82-year-old novelist Patrick O'Brian

O'Brian, whose extraordinary series of 18 novels of the Royal Navy in the Napoleonic wars has become an American publishing phenomenon, is a star at the age of 82. Search for Patrick O'Brian on the Internet, and the monitor screen reels with entries. There are chat-rooms, naval recipes, newsletters, O'Brian calendars and souvenir caps.

This gentle recluse, who loves nothing so much as watching the young wild boar roam through his small vineyard in the foothills of the Pyrenees, has become an industry through his re-creation of life in Nelson's navy.

"I had never much notion of myself as a money-spinner, and as long as the wolf did not actually shove the door right open I was quite happy in my writing-room, with golden orioles outside the window or nightingales, those over-rated birds, and once to utter astonishment a wryneck within a hand's reach, intent upon its breakfast."

Sam Goldwyn studios has bought the film rights to the adventures of Captain "Lucky Jack" Aubrey, and his friend and shipmate Stephen Maturin, who is half-Irish and half-Catalan, a surgeon, naturalist and spy. They play music together, battle the French and sometimes the Americans, win and waste prize money and explore the seven seas. They woo and wed women, vying at least once for the affections of the same glorious Diana, a bold and enchanting creature whose constant presence helps explain the striking appeal of this customarily masculine genre to women. Above all, they explore through novel after novel one of the most compelling friendships in literature.

In the course of each book, to the fury or bafflement of the less dedicated reader, there are instructive longueurs. The flora and fauna of Australasia grace one book, and ways to survive after colliding with an iceberg inform another. The use and abuse of laudanum and the coca leaf is a theme in several. The drama and the limits of early 19th century medicine recur frequently, and so do delicious descriptions of butterflies.

A deeper part of O'Brian's addictive power lies in the constant rumblings of revolutionary excitement that infuse his perception of an age shuddering with transformations: in science as in music; in naval discipline as in the status of women; in the British class system as in the Euro-politics of Napoleon. Recognisable characters grapple with perfectly dated, but curiously familiar predicaments. In his youth, Dr Maturin had flirted with the revolutionary cause in Ireland against British rule, until dedicating himself to battling the greater evil of Napoleon's dictatorship.

The Yellow Admiral, the latest in the series, contains an excellent prize fight, a long discussion on the economic advantages and social dislocations of enclosing common land, and no naval battle to speak of.

But what battles there are; most of them drawn from the life, or at least from the files of The Naval Chronicle and the archives of the National Maritime Museum. "I borrowed Lord Cochrane's taking of the immensely superior Spanish ship Cacafuego in the first book, Master And Commander, Linois's unsuccessful action against the Indiamen in HMS Surprise, and Captain Riou's collision with an iceberg in Desolation Island," O'Brian admits disarmingly. "I do not claim the merit of originality; only that of being a tolerably exact mirror, reflecting the ships and the seamen of an earlier age."

More than 1.5 million copies of the saga have now been sold in the US. Each of the 18 titles is now selling a minimum 1,000 copies a month, and the latest went straight into the New York Times bestseller list. "Neither the Princeton Club in New York nor the National Archives in Washington has ever drawn such numbers to a lecture," marvels his editor at WW Norton, Starling Lawrence. "We have never known anything like this in trade paperback publishing."

Other publishers are cashing in. Henry Holt has just issued A Sea Of Words: A Lexicon And Companion For Patrick O'Brian's Seafaring Tales. Norton has commissioned its own Patrick O'Brian Companion from David Lyon, at Britain's National Maritime Museum in Greenwich.

This is not simply an American craze. Last autumn, in the painted hall of the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, O'Brian was feasted on 1790s naval fare by his British admirers, from US Ambassador (and Admiral) William Crowe to Channel 4's Michael Grade, from the government's William Waldegrave to the rock star Mark Knopfler.

O'Brian began the series with Master And Commander in 1969. What took the readers so long? In 1992, a Washington Post reviewer called him "the best writer you've never heard of". And while in Britain Collins plugged away at publishing him, four successive US publishers tried and failed to make O'Brian sell, until Norton hit the jackpot.

The breakthrough came in 1991, when the New York Times Book Review splashed its front page with an essay by the editor of American Heritage, which insisted these were "the best historical novels ever written". The rest of the American literary press followed, finally noting that other writers, from Britain's Iris Murdoch to America's own Eudora Welty, from the young Phil Caputo to Canada's aged sage Robertson Davies, had all been hailing O'Brian's achievement for years.

Don Graham, publisher of the Washington Post, took to the pages of the Wall Street Journal to confess his own addiction. "I was through the first three books before I knew it." Graham, like former Senator Bob Packwood, former Pentagon assistant secretary Frank Gaffney and film star Charlton Heston have the acute form of the addiction, buying two and three copies to lure their friends into the O'Brian trap. Warren Christopher says one of the best reasons to give up being secretary of state is that he can finally sit down to read O'Brian all the way through.

GRAHAM says he is reminded of Trollope. Others are reminded of Proust, and above all, of Jane Austen. Her navy officers in Persuasion could have served with Lucky Jack Aubrey, shared his prize money, and like him, lost it to the lawyers ashore.

O'Brian is an extraordinary polymath, who still reads Latin for pleasure, although he confesses his Greek "is not what it was", and has always refused all comment on his wartime exploits with British Intelligence, where he worked with the French resistance. He also wrote what is still the best book on Picasso and translated Papillon (among other books) from the French, is an acknowledged expert on 18th century medicine, on pre-Darwinian naturalism, and on nautical matters.

"The O'Brian readers are older, and wealthier than the average. They tend to be academics or lawyers or stockbrokers, professional people who very seldom get obsessed about anything, except for the tales of Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin," says his adoring publisher, Lawrence. "I think it is the lure of the Lost World, the perfect re-creation of the language and customs and perceptions of another time. It is less escapism than discovery."

O'Brian says he is baffled by the way "the books now praised are exactly the same as those which were scorned. Could it conceivably be a matter of phase?

"To take a ludicrous example: Cezanne and Van Gogh said little to most of their contemporaries. Our grandfathers could have bought an El Greco for 100 guineas or less. They were out of phase; the phases, ruled by who-knows-what laws, now coincide. Perhaps on a miniature scale, the same thing may have happened here."

ILLUSTRATION: BARRY LARKING

Nature's own artistic talent

Paul Evans

THE OAK wood provides refuge from a scaringly cold wind, which scythes down the valley. From the little iron gateway the view across Lake Windermere to the Cumbrian fells of the Lake District could be described as a quintessentially English "chocolate box" scene. But it isn't.

The craggy peaks from the Old Man of Coniston to Scafell Pike, swirling in mist and dusted with snow, have a grandeur that makes the spirit soar. They also have a wild awesomeness, which responds to the human presence in the landscape with fierce and violent beauty. After centuries of human struggle to exist, and despite being one of the earliest places to be opened up to tourists, this landscape retains its power to shrug off human endeavour as it does the rain that flies in the cold wind. It inspires respect.

Below the wood, in a hotel by the lake, a conference of earnest speakers addresses the problems facing Britain's countryside. It is generally felt that landscapes like this are oversubscribed with multiple and often irreconcilable demands. This requires collaborative thinking to change public perceptions of the way such places are used, appreciated and conserved. One way to bring about these changes — and the focus for this conference — is to involve art and artists in landscape planning and management.

The role of art in the environment is undergoing a review in Britain. In the aftermath of the eighties' trend for sculpture trails, several initiatives around the country are investigating a new role for artists in the landscape. But as such initiatives gather pace, important questions arise.

Have works of art and sculpture trails failed to engender a strengthened sense of place? There is often a gulf between commissioning bodies and artists and local communities that are supposed to benefit from the art. For many people, public art in the environment is merely decoration, and many local newspapers deride it as a waste of public money. Some schemes, however, receive international acclaim. In Cumbria, the flagship "art in the landscape" initiative is Andy Goldsworthy's sheepfolds project.

Goldsworthy was commissioned with lottery funds to rebuild many of the derelict sheepfolds in the fells. Restoring these circular dry-stone constructions, which have been part of the Cumbrian landscape for centuries, and adding sculptural features that change them from their original purpose of corralling sheep into works of art is regarded by many as a real contribution to both the landscape and cultural expression. But, one is tempted to ask, what is wrong with a derelict sheepfold? Why not allow these structure to "return to nature"?

Asking such questions seems philistine, but aren't we in danger of using art in the landscape to justify human arrogance? No one seems to be gazing out of the window. If anyone was, perhaps the crushing gaze of the mountains would answer the cultural theorising.

Do high profile works like Goldsworthy's sheepfold project really contribute to the landscape? Do the sort of commissions that artists seek from public institutions exhibit a failure of nerve to pursue a new agenda in the environment? There seems to be a lack of resolve among artists to tackle the relationship between culture and nature head-on. As the wind whips up the surface of Lake Windermere, the wild, winter beauty of Cumbria demands respect. Perhaps the best way of showing respect is to do as little as possible.

Bridge Zia Mahmood

MOST bridge magazines are aimed at the serious tournament player, but Bridge Plus is refreshingly different — its audience is the social player. Last year, its editor published Bedside Bridge, an entertaining collection of articles, and the sequel (predictably entitled More Bedside Bridge) would make a fine present for the bridge addict in your family.

This deal, described by Kitty Teltscher in More Bedside Bridge, is a classic problem that arose in real life during a charity event in aid of Dr Barnardo's.

Take the South cards and decide how you would play a contract of six hearts:

North
♠ 10 8 7 4
♥ J 6 3
♦ A 4
♣ J 10 9 8
South
♠ A J 3
♥ A K Q 9 7 4
♦ 9
♣ A K Q

This has been the bidding:

South	West	North	East
2♣	2♦	No	No
2♥	No	4♥	No
4NT	No	5♦	No
6♥	No	No	No

West leads the king of diamonds. How do you continue?

In a sense, you have 12 tricks (six hearts, four clubs and two aces). But the diamond lead is annoying, since it has removed dummy's entry while the club suit is still blocked. You could lead a spade from dummy at the second trick, hoping to find East with the king and queen of spades or with a holding, such as Kx or Qx, but this does not represent a great chance. Better is to cash two top hearts, preparing to claim if the suit divides 2-2. If not, you can try the three top clubs — if that suit divides 3-3, or if the player with club shortage is also short in hearts, you will be able to cross to the jack of trumps to cash the fourth club. Have you made your mind up? The full deal is shown below:

North
♠ 10 8 7 4
♥ J 6 3
♦ A 4
♣ J 10 9 8

West
♠ K 9 6
♥ 8 5 2
♦ K Q J 7 6
♣ 6 2

East
♠ Q 5 2
♥ 10
♦ 10 8 5 3 2
♣ 7 5 4 3

South
♠ A J 3
♥ A K Q 9 7 4
♦ 9
♣ A K Q

As you can see, neither of the possible lines above will succeed. At the table, the declarer, Arthur Goddard, found a truly brilliant solution — at the second trick, he led dummy's small diamond and discarded the ace of clubs! Now he was able to win any return, cash two top hearts and the king and queen of clubs, cross to the jack of hearts and discard his two spade losers on dummy's J10 of clubs.

Tony Priday, British international and captain of many successful teams, was full of praise for his partner's excellent play. But his joy was short-lived, for after the event his wife Vivian informed him that her side had scored 2,140 on the deal. Tony knew, of course, that this meant that her side had bid and made seven clubs, a contract that could have been defeated on a heart lead but which was otherwise makeable by virtue of a diamond ruff in the South hand.

"How did you get to seven clubs?" he enquired.

"Quite easily, dear," replied Vivian. "I'm surprised you missed it!"

Quick crossword no. 347

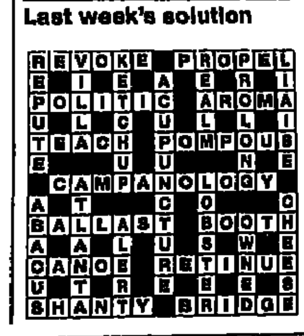
Across

1 Bows? Nonsense! (12)
9 Additional (5)
10 French strong cold wind (7)
11 Sod — horse-racing! (4)
12 Cake decoration (8)
14 Think highly of (6)
15 Migratory bird (6)
18 Dig out (8)
20 Among (4)
22 Acute (7)
23 Gem from oyster (5)
24 First day of Lent (3,9)

Down

2 Meantime (7)
3 Expensive — address? (4)
4 Stoat's winter coat (6)
5 Elegant (8)
6 Welsh breed of dog (5)
7 Spanish surrealist painter (8,4)
8 Third Sunday before Lent (12)
13 Region — speciality (8)
16 Ugandan capital (7)
17 Scattered (6)
19 Fastener — not to miss? (5)
21 Musical work (4)

Last week's solution



Chess Leonard Barden

THE 1996 junior world championships in Menorca and Colombia confirm that China is fast catching up with the West. Chinese girls won the under-20 and under-14 titles, while in the most competitive event, the open world under-20s (previous winners include Kasparov and Karpov), China took silver behind the top-seeded Israeli Emil Sutovsky.

And Britain? Harriet Hunt won silver in the girls under-18, Ruth Sheldon bronze in the girls under-14, and Karl Mah was unbeaten in the under-16 category. However, no Briton took part in the under-20s.

Meanwhile the BCF is trying to raise funds to support a Youth Trust, as well as a chess centre in Hastings. Last month schools took part in a Chess-A-Thon, backed by Kasparov Chess Computers.

The place to spot future masters is in primary schools, where Britain's top GMs Short, Adams and Sadler all made their mark aged eight or nine, but where the BCF's current restrictive policy for English under-10s harms our best talents at a vital formative stage. Since 1990, only the exceptional Luke McShane has been allowed to compete in the world under-10 championship, and even that took sustained lobbying.

McShane won gold at eight and is now, at 12, beating IMs, yet the BCF has failed to learn from his success. Gawain Jones, nine, from York, won the 1996 British and London under-10s, defeated a Fide-rated opponent at Newcastle, and drew with a 188-grade and beat a 165 when scoring 2½/6 in the Bolton Open. Still eligible for the 1997 world under-10 competition, Jones clearly should have played this year.

The paradox is that 20 years ago, England pioneered an under-10 fast-track system that helped Short, Adams and Sadler to become world class by 14 and developed a generation of grandmasters. Other countries then eagerly adopted the blueprint, which the BCF has since abandoned. England under-10s are now barred even from annual under-11 matches against Scotland and Wales. It's a recipe for future decline at adult level.

Hunt (Eng) v Blazkova (Cz)

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 f4 e6 7 Qf3 Be7 8 g4 Nfd7 9 g5 Qc7 10 Be3 b5 11 0-0-0 b4?! Black needs accurate defence against White's pawn rush. Bb7 12 Kb1 Nc5 13 a3 Nbd7 keeps more options open.

12 Nce2 Bb7 13 Ng3 Nc6 14 Kb1 0-0 15 h4 g6? Opening up her own king. **16 h5 Nxd4 17 Rxd4 Rfc8** If e5 18 hxg6! fxg6 (exd4 19 Qh5) 19 Bc4+ Kh8 20 Rxh7+! leads to mate.

18 Qg2 Qa5 19 hxg6 fxg6 20 Bc4 Nf8 21 Bb3 Qb5 22 Qh3 d5 23 f5! Imploding the defences. If e5 24 Rxd5! **Qe8 24 exd5** If exd5 **Bxd5? 25 Rxd5 Resigns** If exd5 26 Bxd5+ Kh8 27 Bd4+ and mates.

No 2453

White mates in three moves, against any defence (by G Thoren).

Cricket Third Test: Australia v West Indies

Ambrose pace causes havoc

Guardian Reporters

CURTLY AMBROSE destroyed Australia with his pace as West Indies recorded a six-wicket victory over the home side in the third Test at Melbourne last Saturday. Ambrose took four wickets for 17 and Australia folded on 122 in the second innings, giving the paceman 9-72. Only Steve Waugh put up any resistance against the West Indians' pace attack.

The visitors lost Sherwin Campbell for a duck and Brian Lara for two but Shivnarine Chanderpaul and Carl Hooper saw them home. Thanks to the return to form of key players such as Ambrose and Jimmy Adams, they now head for Adelaide and Perth one Test down with two to play.

When Adams and Walsh walked out to resume their last-wicket stand with a first-innings lead of only 14, neither could have dreamt that less than seven hours later Adams would be completing a six-wicket victory. The Jamaican gave the West Indian team a fine start, extending the lead to 36 as he farmed the bowling and took three boundaries off Warne to end unbeaten on 74.

Then it was over to Ambrose: it took him only five balls to add to his five first-innings total, claiming Hayden's wicket. Langer, the other new face in Australia's unsettled top order, also went for a duck, caught off the thigh pad and the back of the bat.

Ambrose . . . in deadly form

On Boxing Day, a lack of support for Ambrose had allowed Australia to make a partial recovery from a disastrous start. Walsh was then suffering from a shoulder injury, but shrugged it off on Saturday to claim the crucial wickets of Taylor, Mark Waugh and Blewett in a quality spell either side of lunch. Hooper picked up his fifth slip catch of the match to send back Taylor with Australia still eight runs behind. Waugh was leg before to a ball that kept low, and Blewett caught behind off a beauty.

Benjamin ensured that there were to be no more heroics from Healy, and his ability to skid the ball through also accounted for Reiffel before Steve Waugh finally found in Warne a partner to stick around for a while. But immediately after slashing Ambrose over the slips for his third boundary, the local hero was caught one-handed by Adams at short leg.

Ambrose, who trapped Gillespie leg before, was denied the 10 wickets he had promised his teammates before the match when Benjamin bowled Waugh for a defiant 37, made in more than two hours. But with four for 17 in the second innings, despite a sore hamstring, to follow his five for 55 in the first, Ambrose was still a clear Man of the Match.

McGrath and Chanderpaul enhanced their claims as worthy runners-up when West Indies set about a victory target of 87 after tea. McGrath had Campbell caught hooking for a duck in the first over, then had Samuels leg before and kept his rabbit Lara in his pot. McGrath ended with match figures of eight for 81.

But Chanderpaul followed his first-innings half-century with another composed innings of 40, playing some delightful shots off Warne before making way for Adams to return for the last rites.

Scores: Australia 219 and 122; West Indies 255 and 87 for 4

Second Test: Zimbabwe v England

Stewart sets new standard

David Hopps in Harare

ONE of English cricket's long-accepted truths has been that Alec Stewart never scores runs while keeping wicket. Pick him as a specialist batsman and he will plunder to his heart's content; overload him with the wicketkeeper's role and he will perform as if he has forgotten to take off the gauntlets.

But Stewart had already set himself new batting standards as a wicketkeeper with his 73 in the opening drawn Test in Bulawayo, an achievement largely overshadowed in the frenzy of an England run chase that finished only a run short of victory. Last Sunday he followed with an unbeaten 101, his ninth century at this level and an innings that illuminated a second Test which ended in a draw after heavy overnight rain left the umpires with no choice but to abandon the game.

England have been at their most inconsistent in this two-Test series but at the very least their character deserves grudging recognition. Both here and in Bulawayo they have conceded the initiative with poor first-day performances only to claw their way back into the game with considerable determination.

A first-innings deficit of 59 still left them vulnerable last Sunday, especially considering the slowness of the pitch and outfield which put every run at a premium. Zimbabwe, and Brandes in particular, bowled well in the first hour without much luck. Instead it was leg-spinner Paul Strang who caused tremors in the English dressing room as he had Knight caught at slip and then enticed Hussain into driving a fullish delivery to Houghton at short extra.

Had Stewart not been reprieved on 15, when Dekker failed to hold a difficult catch at square leg, it might have been so different. Instead he bedded in, suppressing his natural boldness to reach his century in slightly more than six hours.

Stewart has completed 1996 with the highest runs aggregate in the calendar year of any Test batsman. Considering that he was dropped for the first Test against India last summer and that, at 33, his international career was held in some quarters to be over, he has not only emphasised his powers of survival, he has underlined his quality of performance.

Scores: Zimbabwe 215; England 156 and 195 for 3. Match abandoned

South Africa too hot for India

SOUTH Africa's four-man pace battery proved too hot for India as they slumped to a 328-run defeat on the third day of the first Test at Durban last Saturday.

Allan Donald, who took five for 40 in India's first innings, devastated the visitors' top order with an opening spell of three for 10 in six overs. It took brave batting by Rahul Dravid to see India past the previous worst Test total of 42. They were eventually all out for 66.

"It was a case of bad batting; we should have applied ourselves a lot more and showed more determination," India's captain, Sachin Tendulkar, said. "But basically it was a bowlers' wicket."

The tourists were set 395 for victory after dismissing the home side for 259 in the second innings, with Venkatesh Prasad taking 5-93 to achieve career best match figures of 10-153. Earlier, South Africa lost five wickets for 21 runs as they made 259.

Scores: South Africa 235 and 259; India 100 and 66

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Wembley wins race for £230m national stadium

WEMBLEY has emerged triumphant in the race for Britain's new national stadium. The 80,000-seat English National Stadium, to be built — or rather rebuilt — at the existing site, will cost between £210-£230 million, with more than half the money coming from the National Lottery.

Manchester, which was the only other city in the running for the stadium, received the consolation prize of being awarded £60 million of lottery money towards a £90-£100 million, 60,000-seat stadium to host the 2002 Commonwealth Games, and a further £20 million for a swimming complex costing £29 million.

The FA Cup Final may move from Wembley for the first time since 1923 as a result of the massive redevelopment work to be carried out at the stadium. Manchester is hoping to benefit by playing host to the event.

FORMULA One cars are to be fitted with aircraft-style "black boxes" from the start of new Grand Prix season. The International Automobile Federation hopes the equipment will help design and safety experts in the teams. The accident data recorder stores information about what happens to a car immediately before and during a crash and is virtually indestructible. "The implications for safety are very encouraging," the federation president, Max Moseley, said.

IN the comings and goings at the end of last year, Frank Clark stepped down as manager of Nottingham Forest after his team had been without a win in 16 matches — a Premiership record — and promptly took up the reins at struggling Manchester City. Forest entered 1997 in the hands of captain Stuart Pearce, who has assumed the position of caretaker manager.

In cricket, former Sussex captain Alan Wells, aged 35, joined Kent on a five-year contract, with Neil Taylor, the 37-year-old batsman, moving in the opposite direction.

Rugby Union club side Harlequins strengthened their French connection with the acquisition of Thierry Lacroix. The 29-year-old fly-half has agreed a deal believed to be worth £250,000 over two and a half years. Lacroix joins his international team-mates Laurent Cabannes and Laurent Benezech at the club.

MATTHIAS SAMMER, who led Germany to victory in Euro 96, has beaten England captain Alan Shearer to the Golden Ball, the European Footballer of the Year award. Sammer, the 29-year-old Borussia Dortmund sweeper, topped the poll with 144 votes, beating the Brazilian Ronaldo by three votes. Shearer was third with 107.

BRIAN McCORD, formerly of Stockport County, became the first player to be awarded damages in the High Court against another player and his club. McCord is to receive £250,000 for a tackle which broke his leg and ended his career. Mr Justice Ian Kennedy found that the then Swansea City captain, John Cornforth, had made an error when he challenged McCord for the ball during Swansea's game against Stockport in March 1993.

Other professionals who have sued opponents have lost their cases or seen them settled out of court.



Becker . . . family required bodyguards PHOTOGRAPH JURGEN HASENKOPF

Racists threaten Becker

Denis Staunton

TENNIS star Boris Becker is planning to emigrate from Germany in the next three years, probably to the United States, because of racial threats to his black wife and infant son.

The 29-year-old world No 2 said in a television interview that persistent threats had made him consider abandoning tennis for good.

"It has become more intense because of my little boy and my wife. It happens when I spend a lot of time in Germany and there are a lot of press reports about me. Suddenly the lunatics come out of their holes and send threatening letters and so on. I ask myself if it's worth it, to live in fear all the time," he said.

Becker said that he, his wife Barbara and son Noah were under 24-hour police protection during the World Tennis Championship in Hanover in November because of threats he had received.

"We were each protected by 10 bodyguards, and when I went to training there were three cars behind me and three in front, like in the worst thriller."

The hour-long interview was recorded in Florida, where Becker recently bought a £500,000 house near Jim Courier, a fellow tennis star.

Admitting that he felt more at ease in the US than in Germany, Becker confirmed that he planned to emigrate permanently before his son reached school age.